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# 1. 2005

## 1.1 May

Welcome to Bryan and Althea's Website! (2005-05-20 11:54)

Thanks to Ben and Melanie for getting this set up for us!



Thanks for visiting! Our website has a gallery with lots of photos, a news section, and a section that features some of our favorite websites. Enjoy!  
Althea and Bryan

## **Yay! A website! (2005-05-27 08:53)**

Sending a big thanks to Ben and Melanie for setting up our website for us. We're really excited to have this as a forum for sharing photos and stories of our expanding family.

## **Baby Dotzour Weekly Updates - first trimester (2005-05-28 21:32)**

11/19/2004

An update for the raspberry this week

Here's the update I got today: Your baby isn't much bigger now than last week in actual size — another quarter inch at most — but that's almost double what he was last week. He's now the size of a raspberry. If you had a window into your womb, you'd notice his eyelids forming, the tip of his nose developing, and his distinct, slightly webbed fingers and toes.

Your baby still appears to have a small tail (actually, it's an extension of his tailbone), which will disappear in the next few weeks. But that's the only thing getting smaller. Now almost half an inch long — roughly the size of a raspberry — he

has elbow joints and distinct, slightly webbed fingers and toes. In his oversized head, both hemispheres of his brain are developing. His teeth and the inside of his mouth are forming, and his ears continue to develop. Eyelid folds partially cover his tiny peepers, which already have some color, and the tip of that nose you'll be tweaking someday is emerging. His skin is paper-thin and his veins are clearly visible.

Your little one also has an appendix and a pancreas, which will eventually produce the hormone insulin to aid in digestion. His liver is busy producing red blood cells, and a loop of your baby's growing intestines is bulging into his umbilical cord,

which now has distinct blood vessels to carry oxygen and nutrients to and from his tiny body. You can't feel his gyrations yet, but your baby is like a little jumping bean, moving in fits and starts around his watery home.

12/03/2004

the raspberry is a grape!

Nine Weeks! (we think...)

Your new resident is nearly an inch long — barely the size of a grape — and weighs just a fraction of an ounce, but he's poised for rapid weight gain now that his basic physical structure is in place. He's also starting to look more and more human. His embryonic "tail" is now completely gone and his body parts — including organs, muscles, and nerves — are kicking into gear.

His eyelids are fused shut and won't open until 27 weeks. He has earlobes, and by week's end, the inner workings of his ears will be complete. His upper lip is fully formed, too, and his mouth, nose, and nostrils are more distinct. The tips of his

fingers are slightly enlarged where his touch pads are developing. All major joints — his shoulders, elbows, wrists, knees, and ankles — are working, enabling your baby to move his limbs. As for his heart, it has divided into four chambers now, and the valves have started to develop. External sex organs are there, but won't be distinguishable as male or female for another few weeks.

Thought you might enjoy seeing my weekly update on the the baby. It's my friday morning treat:) Well, that and a peppermint steamer and an almond scone. Have a great day! Althea

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12/10/2004

It's a kumquat!

10 weeks (estimated)... Our ultrasound is on Dec. 21, so hopefully we'll have a better date (and a photo!) after that.

Taken from [http://www. babycenter .com/mybabycenter/110.html](http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/110.html)

Your baby's started growing tiny fingernails and toenails and can now kick and swallow — pretty impressive for someone the size of a walnut. Within the next few weeks, your featherweight baby will more than double in size, from just over an inch to nearly 3 inches. At your next prenatal appointment, you may be able to hear her heart beating with a stethoscope-like instrument called a Doppler.

Your baby is no longer an embryo! Though she's barely the size of a kumquat — just an inch or so long, crown to bottom — and weighs less than a quarter of an ounce, she now has completed the most critical portion of her

development. This is the beginning of the so-called fetal period, a time when the tissues and organs in her body rapidly grow and mature. Her vital organs — the liver, kidney, intestines, brain, and lungs — are now in place and starting to function (although they'll continue to develop throughout your pregnancy). Her liver continues to make blood cells, and the yolk sac, which previously supplied these cells, is no longer needed and begins to disappear.

During the next three weeks, your baby's length will more than double to nearly 3 inches. Her head is proportionately smaller now than it was a few weeks ago, but it's still almost half the length of her entire body. Her forehead temporarily bulges with her developing brain and sits high on her head; it will later recede to give her a more human appearance. Each day, more minute details — including tiny fingernails, toenails, and peach-fuzz hair.

### **Memorial Day weekend at the hospital (2005-05-28 22:46)**

In a recent twist of events, my mom is residing at St. Mary's hospital while they run a variety of tests to determine what is wrong with her pancreas.

Mom suggested that I post updates to this website so her family and friends can stay apprised of her condition.

On Thursday afternoon (May 26), Mom made a doctor's appointment because she was experiencing blood in her urine. After running some tests, they determined it was kidney stones (which she's had at least once before). However, when they ran the tests (doppler ultrasound) to diagnose the kidney stones, they found that there are other problems and they admitted her to St. Mary's Hospital for further testing.

On Friday night, they ran a contrast catscan and identified a blockage in her pancreatic duct. See here for a diagram of the pancreas.

Also, here's one site (of many) that describes the function of the pancreas.

This afternoon (Saturday the 28), doctors did a cool-sounding procedure (to me, but I'm odd like that) called endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) where they ran a tube down mom's throat, through her stomach, and to the duodenum. Here's a nice website describing that procedure.

Unfortunately, the endoscopic tools were not able to clear the mass that was blocking the tube leading out of the pancreas. As a result, we're now waiting until tomorrow when doctors will try a different procedure.

At this time, Mom says she feels just fine (besides having been in the hospital for the last couple days, being on a liquid diet, and having an IV). Her potassium levels are very low (probably as a result of her pancreas not being able to secrete its enzymes, and I think she has slight jaundice). Her bloodwork has shown abnormalities (which is why they found all this in the first place), her gallbladder is enlarged with possible gallstones and her liver apparently has fatty deposits. It's quite likely that these are related symptoms, but the doctors still have some work to do to find out what is wrong.

Tomorrow, the plan is for doctors to use a needle to come at the pancreas from the side. I'm not sure which procedure this is, but the word from the doctor was that they were hoping that using this technique that they'll be able to clear the blockage, insert a stent into the currently blocked pancreatic duct, and get a biopsy of the offending mass.

I think it'll probably be a few days then until we hear back about the results of that test (being Memorial Day on Monday). Doctors have ideas about additional tests to run on Tuesday, but I don't have any details on that yet.

That's a rough description of the situation over the last couple days. Marettta came home from college last weekend, so all four of us kids are home, and between us and Dad and Terry, we're keeping Mom well-occupied. I plan to update this site as we know more.

All the best,  
Althea

## **Baby Dotzour Weekly Updates - second and third trimester (2005-05-30 21:35)**

Letters to family and friends from February 14 - May 10

February 14

Week 21 Baby update

Hi All!

According to my June 27 due date, I'm now over half way there. Something tells me, though, that the second half of pregnancy is when things get really interesting. Maybe that comes from seeing how huge Vicki's belly is. She even said that when he flips around in her belly that it makes the bed jiggle!

Happy Valentine's Day:) Bryan made me a delicious dinner including cake tonight, so my taste buds and belly are very happy right now. We painted the nursery (actually, now we're going to re-paint the ceiling since it came out way too strong with the colors and color washing technique we used). My mom also recently gave in to grandmothering urges, and we got our little guy some really cute outfits last weekend. I should take photos of the clothes to share! We found a cute little polar bear printed sleeper that will look great with the bear hat and mittens Aunt Melanie sent:)

The last week has been a good one pregnancy-wise. Besides feeling my belly skin stretch and often falling asleep before 9 pm, I can't say I've felt much different. I still munch on food all the time. Big meals are hard to do when one's stomach is being impeded by a big sweet-potato sized baby:) I'm feeling light popping feelings or soft fluttering feelings, and they've become stronger where I'm sure I've felt something. I can't say that I've really felt a strong nudge yet. Many of my regular shirts still fit around the girth, but they're getting too short! It's pretty amazing to see all these changes happening in a relatively short number of weeks. I've only told a few people at the gym that I'm pregnant, and I get some secret enjoyment out of working out with people who don't know. It's not going to be too long, though, before my belly reveals my secret.

Well, I've got to finish packing my bags...I head out tomorrow to the Milwaukee area for a Gathering Waters-run land trust retreat. I'll be back home on Friday. Hope you had a fun Valentine's Day doing sweet things for the people who make you smile. Love, Althea

Baby Center week 21 update

Your baby now weighs about three-quarters of a pound and is approximately 10 1/2 inches long. Her eyebrows and eyelids are fully developed. You may soon feel like she's practicing martial arts as her initial fluttering movements turn into full-fledged kicks and nudges. You may also discover a pattern to her activity as you get to know her better. Some babies are restless in the evening, for example, just as you're trying to fall asleep. Others get busy during the day.

From <http://www.babiesonline.com/pregnancy/week-by-week/week21.asp> Your baby is still pretty active and continues to move all over in the amniotic fluid. However, towards the end of this trimester the baby will begin to settle, usually in a head down position. Your baby is beginning to show evidence of eyebrows and eyelashes and the hair on his scalp is much more visible. He wakes and sleeps in regular intervals, similar to what a newborn would do. This may be apparent to you in his movement patterns. He regularly ingests and absorbs large quantities of the

amniotic fluid and excretes urine. Your baby is approximately 27-30 cm (10-10.5 inches) and weighs about three quarters of a pound.

February 23

Week 22...and moving around!

Hi All,

It's been a good couple of weeks. First of all, the sun is heading back, which makes me so very happy. This week I haven't had to turn on the porch light to see the back steps when I leave the house in the morning, and when I left work yesterday, I caught a glimpse of the sun before it set. When I got home, natural light was still coming in the windows...a phenomenon I thought only took place on the weekends. It feels good to see that the sun is returning to us!

Then there's the fun part about really being able to feel more distinct baby movements. I wouldn't say the "kicks" are strong yet, but they're noticeably not just stomach rumbles, and he's often pretty active as I lie down to go to sleep. I haven't been sore or uncomfortable, and even though I've gained about five pounds and my belly is sticking out a bit more, I don't feel cumbersome or restricted in movement. So it's a great month.

One of the girls at the gym asked me today if I was pregnant, and that marks the first time someone has asked. It's getting to be obvious, but I think it's a pretty cute belly, so I'm OK with the change:) It'll be easier when the news spreads more and it doesn't have to be explained to everyone!

I've got a pot of three Hyacinth bulbs on my desk, and they're starting to sprout. A nice shot of green with promises of sweet smells in a few weeks.

This weekend Bryan is going to Ann Arbor to see some friends before one of them moves back to Australia. We're planning to make another trip out this spring so I can go too. I'm going to Seattle for a meeting of a Carleton alumni committee that I serve on. I'm really looking forward to seeing a bit of Aunt Kate and Uncle Greg! Thanks to Mom, Dad, and Joey for watching April while we're gone:)

That's my news for now. I'm really looking forward to seeing Mom and Dad Dotzour in Chicago in a couple weeks. Here are links to a couple Ofoto albums I've uploaded: Photos of our short-lived snowman...Tippy

Photos of the painting and re-painting of our nursery

Have a great week! Love, Althea

Babycenter update - Week 22

Your baby now looks like a miniature newborn, checking in at 10.9 inches and almost 1 pound. Her skin will continue to appear wrinkled until she gains enough weight to fill it out, and the fine hair (lanugo) that covers her head and body is now visible. Her lips are becoming more distinct, and the first signs of teeth are appearing as buds beneath her gum line. Her eyes are developed, though the iris (the colored part of the eye) still lacks pigment. Eyelids and eyebrows are in place, and her pancreas, essential for hormone production, is developing steadily. Your stomach may become a hand magnet — people will touch it without asking permission. It's okay to say no. And if people are telling you that you look smaller or bigger than you should at this point, remember that all women grow — and show — at different rates. What's important is that you see your practitioner for regular visits so she can make sure your baby's development is on track.

March 4

Week 23 update on Baby Dotzour

Hi All,

I'm running behind this week...I haven't even had a chance to check my hotmail account to see what the babycenter said about the growth of Junior this week. Yesterday I had another monthly doctor's appointment. Just a quick hello, how's it going, but it's always fun to hear the little guy's heart beating. I met with the nurse practitioner this time, and she seemed to have a lot more time to answer questions. She let me listen to him move around and to the heart beating for quite a long time. The heart beat sounds more like a strong, regular beat (at the beginning it was a soft swishing sound). She said it was in the 150s. He's kicking inside me right now! As my belly as expanded the last couple weeks, he's moved north, and I've been feeling lots of movement right below my sternum and on either

side just below (and out!) from my rib cage. Bryan felt him move for the first time a couple days ago. Sometimes when I sit in meetings, I've started to get where I can see my shirt tapping slightly. When he's really active, which isn't super often, it feels like there's a pingpong ball in me:) I think in the last week or so, he's gotten stronger and the soft nudges have turned into strong nudges and soft kicks. As my belly has grown out this month, I've started gaining weight. Not surprising given how hungry I've been! This week my appetite has lessened a bit (I just have to remember to assess when I'm hungry rather than sticking on the munching-all-the-time that I was doing last week!). Feeling great otherwise. I missed nearly a week at the gym between my trip to Seattle last weekend, my conference on Monday, and laziness on Tuesday and Wednesday. But now I'm back in the swing of things. We are REALLY looking forward to warm weather. My doctor gave me a thumbs-up about doing the Settynde Mai walk on May 15 again this year, so I'm looking forward to beginning to train for that. So is April. She can't wait for us to resume walking her:) I took some photos of the baby clothes that are hanging in our sweet nursery right now. Have a great Friday and a wonderful weekend! Love, Althea

#### Baby center update Week 23

Your baby is more than 11 inches long and weighs just over a pound. His skin is red and wrinkled. Blood vessels in his lungs are developing to prepare him for breathing. He can swallow, but he normally won't pass his first stool (called meconium) until after birth. Loud noises heard often in utero — such as your dog barking or the roar of a vacuum cleaner — probably won't faze your baby when he hears them outside the womb. Feeling pretty good? Turn on the radio and sway to the music. With her sense of movement well developed now, your baby can feel you dance. Those dainty fetal movements have progressed to karate kicks. You may even be able to see your baby squirm underneath your clothing.

March 9

Week 24 update on Baby D.

Hi All,

Hope your week is going well. I don't feel like I have much to report this week... I've been super hungry these days. And I get sleepy if my blood sugar gets too low. But I still haven't been that tired (until about 8 pm:) or experiencing many other symptoms. I took my first Yogamom's prenatal yoga class last night and really enjoyed it. I haven't regularly gone to a yoga class in about a year, and it felt great to find a good instructor and a nice space. It was also kind of neat to join a bunch of other pregnant people for the evening. I felt like I'd found a little club I didn't know I belonged to:) Some of the women were at 39 weeks...I'm not quite ready for that yet! They were huge and seemed pretty uncomfortable. I imagine that if I follow a similar pattern to others that in a month or two sleeping well is going to get much more difficult. Last night I slept with a little pillow under my belly, and that seemed to be pretty comfortable. Bowser's still sleeping under the covers with me (he'll probably stop when the weather warms up), and he was a bit confused about why there was a pillow down at his spot by my belly. Sometimes when I wake up in the night and am just awake (I'm hoping this is a pregnancy phenomenon that goes away soon!), I hold a kitty in each arm and think sleeping cat thoughts to try to get myself back to sleep. Last weekend we helped Terry move on Saturday, and on Sunday I hung out a bit with my family, took the dog for a walk, and didn't do much else! Bryan's still getting over his respiratory cold, but he seems to be getting better this week. That's my news for the week! Love, Althea

#### Babycenter Update - week 24

Your baby's growing steadily, gaining about a quarter of a pound since last week, when she was just over a pound. Since she's almost a foot long, that makes a pretty lean figure, but her body is filling out proportionally and she'll soon put on more baby fat. Your baby's skin is thin, translucent, and wrinkled, her brain is growing rapidly, and her taste buds are developing. Her lungs are developing "branches" of the respiratory "tree" and cells that produce surfactant, a substance that helps the air sacs inflate easily.

How your life's changing: The top of your uterus is now an inch or so above your belly button, which means it's about the size of a soccer ball. With the skin on your abdomen and breasts stretching, you may feel a little itchy now and then. If your skin is dry, keeping it well moisturized may help. Also, your eyes may be sensitive to light and feel gritty and dry. This is a perfectly normal pregnancy symptom known as dry-eye. To ease your discomfort, use an artificial

tears solution to add moisture.

Most women will have a glucose screening test (also called a glucose challenge test or GCT) between 24 and 28 weeks. This test checks for gestational diabetes, a high-blood-sugar condition during pregnancy. Untreated, high blood sugar increases your risk for having a difficult vaginal delivery or needing a cesarean section because it causes your baby to grow overly fat, especially in his upper body. It also increases your baby's risk for complications like low blood sugar at birth. A positive result on your GCT test doesn't mean you have gestational diabetes, but it does mean that you should have the more involved glucose tolerance test (GTT) to find out.

Week 25, and kicking!

March 15

I just wrote this note, but then I accidentally opened a new link in this window, and my message was lost. Argh! So what I just said was something like:

Our little guy has been moving around a lot in the past week or so. His movements have become stronger and more regular, and it's become more possible to have people feel him when he's moving. A couple weeks ago, he'd kick, but when I put Bryan's hand there, he wouldn't move again for minutes or more. Now when he's active, he moves for quite a while. In fact, this morning, Bryan could feel him bopping around before I was even fully awake. He said, "Wow, he's moving," and I had to think about it before I noticed that indeed he was!

Bryan and I had a great weekend in Chicago with Mom and Dad Dotzour. The sun was shining, the Chicago River was dyed Kelly Green, and we were in great company. We went shopping for some fun maternity (and paternity) clothes, and I'm feeling very stylish. What fun!! The girls at work are throwing a join baby shower for Vicki and me on Saturday, so that should be fun! It's my first baby shower...as a guest or as a baby-bearing person.

Have a great week! Love, Althea and the Great Expansion

PS. We've been having fun looking at baby names. Here's a neat website that graphs how common names have been over the last 100 years. A fun site to spend some time surfing: <http://www.babynamewizard.com/namevoyager/Inv0105.html>

Babycenter Update: Week 25

How your baby's growing: Head to heels, your baby now measures about 13 1/2 inches. His weight — a pound and a half — doesn't sound like much, but he's beginning to exchange his long, lean look for some baby fat. As he does, his wrinkled skin will begin to smooth out and he'll start to look more and more like a newborn. His hair is probably recognizable now (in color and texture), although both may change after he's born.

How your life's changing: Your baby's not the only one with more hair — your locks may look more full and lustrous than ever. It's not that you're growing more hair, but the hair you'd normally shed is sticking around longer than usual. You're getting bigger by the minute, but that's no reason to stop exercising — just modify your routine as your body changes.

When you have your glucose-screening test at 24 to 28 weeks, your practitioner may take a second tube of blood at the same time to check for anemia. Although your blood volume increases dramatically during pregnancy, the total amount of your red blood cells becomes diluted — a problem sometimes called physiologic anemia that's common in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. If your blood tests show that you have anemia, your caregiver will likely recommend that you take a supplement.

Have you started thinking about baby names yet? Choosing a name is an important decision, but it should be a fun one, too. Look to family history (Great Grandpa Zeb), favorite locations (Venice, where you honeymooned), or cherished literary or film characters (Greta, Meg, or Rhett, for example). Check out a couple of baby-name books to help you brainstorm, too.

April 4

It's catch-up week...Baby Dotzour week 26, 27, and 28 update

Good morning!

I got pretty far behind on sending weekly updates. I think I've just been really focused at work, and when I get home, I don't like the idea of spending more time in front of a computer! Bryan and I had a wonderful weekend. The weather



was just incredible...the ice on Lake Monona melted on Friday or Saturday, and all weekend the sky was blue and the sun was shining, and the air was warm. Ah, it was delightful. We had fun being home owners and spent quite a bit of Saturday cleaning out the garage, cleaning up the yard, and washing the house and windows. All our neighbors were out too, and we enjoyed revisiting with people...winter just isn't the most social of times! The dogs were all very happy to see each other again too. April has been a three-legged dog the past few days. We had a thunderstorm last week, and she dug at the basement floor until she wore her toenails down to the quick. After bleeding all over, it seems like her nails are starting to heal, but they clearly hurt a lot, and our poor girl is in quite a bit of pain. That doesn't stop her from rolling around on her back and cuddling, though. Hopefully she'll heal up soon. Bryan and I went for a walk down to Olbrich Gardens last night and walked around for a while. There's hints of little tips of green coming out here and there, and we're looking forward to seeing the progression over the next few weeks.

So what's been going on baby-wise? Well, let's see, since the last time I wrote, I've continued growing. I think my belly is about 38 inches around. Sometimes I feel pretty huge!) My co-workers threw a baby shower for Vicki and me on March 19, and that was a lot of fun. It was the first baby shower I've been to, and I enjoyed learning the games and talking with lots of other people about babies. We got some fun books and CDs and bath stuff and some of the essentials like nail clippers and brushes and thermometers. I've been given so much. Our next step is to find a dresser so we have a place to keep it! Bryan and I have been visiting day care options, and while we haven't settled on our solution yet, we'll need to decide soon as all the spaces to start in October are filling up (and most are already gone!). It's amazing how far ahead you have to plan! And it's really hard to know how to make the right decision. I haven't even met the baby yet! I took my glucose test during week 26, and the results from that came back normal, so I don't have to worry about gestational diabetes at this point. Good thing, because I don't want to have to limit my ice cream and cookie intake! The blood tests showed that my iron levels were a little low, so I'm taking an extra supplement and trying to eat more meat. Vicki is at 38 weeks this week (she's due on April 16), and she's now taking many more supplements. Apparently as the baby gets bigger, it starts pulling more of what it needs to grow from the mother's body, so it becomes harder to keep your own levels of certain elements high when Junior keeps using them to grow! I've sure been eating enough, though. I'm hungry all the time, or at least every couple-few hours, and there's just no dissuading me when I'm ready to eat. mmm fooodddd. That said, the scale still says that I've only gained 12 pounds, but given the size of my belly I'm not sure how that's possible. My last doctor's appointment was last week, and the heart sounded good. She said it was at 149 beats/min. He was pretty quiet for a week in mid-March, but action has steadily picked up again, and this weekend, he startled me several times and learned how to insert a foot up into my ribcage. Fun trick.

That's a catch-up of the last few weeks. My next doctor's appointment is on the 18th (then go down to every two weeks). Bryan and I start a child birthing class on Wednesday night and continue that until mid-May. We're also signed up for a couple infant care classes a breastfeeding class, and probably other classes that I've forgotten about. Have a great week! Love, Althea and Baby D

## Week 26

<http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/126.html>

**How your baby's growing:** Your baby now weighs a little under 2 pounds and measures about 14 inches, from head to heel. The nerve pathways in her ears are developing, which means her response to sounds is growing more consistent. Her lungs are developing now, too, as she continues to take small breaths of amniotic fluid — good practice for when she's born and takes that first breath of air. If you're having a boy, his testicles are beginning to descend into his scrotum — a trip that will take about two to three days. • Note: Experts say every baby develops differently — even in the womb. This developmental information is designed to give you a general idea of how your baby is growing.

**How your life's changing:** Around this time, your blood pressure may be increasing slightly as it returns to its normal pre-pregnancy range. (It was at a low from 22 to 24 weeks.) Though preeclampsia most often occurs in the last trimester, this is a good time to be aware of the warning signs of this dangerous condition that occurs in about 3 to 7 percent of all pregnancies. Signs you should be alert for include swelling of the hands and face, sudden weight gain (due to water retention), blurry vision, seeing spots before your eyes, sudden severe or persistent headaches, or upper abdominal pain. By checking for high blood pressure and protein in your urine, your caregiver will monitor you

for preeclampsia at your routine prenatal visits, but call her immediately if you have any of these symptoms before your next appointment. Early identification of preeclampsia is essential for the health of you and your baby.

If your back seems a little achy lately, you can thank pregnancy hormones (which are loosening up your joints and ligaments) and your shifting center of gravity. Walking, standing, or sitting for long periods, bending and lifting can all put a strain on your back. A warm bath — or cool compress — might bring relief. Or you may want to schedule a prenatal massage by a trained therapist. Use a pregnancy wedge when sleeping, to support your back and abdomen. Try to maintain good posture, which will help reduce the strain on your back, and always take care when bending and lifting. If you experience severe pain or numbness in any area of your body, call your practitioner.

#### Week 27

<http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/127.html>

**How your baby's growing:** Your baby is really starting to fill up your uterus. This week he weighs almost 2 pounds and is about 14.4 inches long with his legs extended. He can now open and close his eyes, and he sleeps and wakes at regular intervals. He may suck his fingers, and although his lungs are still immature, they would be capable of functioning — with assistance — if he were to be born prematurely. Chalk up any rhythmic movement you may be feeling to a case of baby hiccups, which may be common from now on. Each episode usually lasts only a few moments, and isn't bothersome to him, so enjoy the tickle. With more brain tissue developing, your baby's brain is very active now. Wonder what he's thinking? • **Note:** Experts say every baby develops differently — even in the womb. This developmental information is designed to give you a general idea of how your baby is growing.

**How your life's changing:** Your body is gearing up for the final lap, so you may start noticing some new symptoms. Along with an aching back, for example, you may find that your leg muscles cramp up now and then. They're carrying extra weight, after all, and your uterus is putting extra demands on your circulation. (As your uterus expands, it puts pressure on the blood vessels that return blood from your legs to your heart and on the nerves leading from your trunk to your legs.) Unfortunately, the cramps are likely to get worse as your pregnancy progresses. Leg cramps are more common at night but can also happen during the day. Flexing your foot (by pointing your toes forward and then flexing them back toward your shins) stretches the calf and should give you some relief. Walking for a few minutes or massaging your calf sometimes helps, too.

#### Week 28

**How your baby's growing:** By this week, your baby weighs a little over 2 pounds and measures about 14.8 inches from the top of her head to her heels. She can open her eyes — which now sport lashes — and she'll turn her head toward a continuous, bright light from the outside. Her fat layers are beginning to form, too, as she gets ready for life outside the womb.

**How your life's changing:** If the blood work done at your first prenatal visit showed that you're Rh negative, you'll receive an injection of Rh immunoglobulin to prevent your body from developing antibodies that could attack your baby's blood. (You'll receive another shot of Rh immunoglobulin after you give birth if your baby is Rh positive.)

#### April 11

Week 29 Baby D update

Good morning!

Looks like it's going to be another lovely spring day. I wish this weekend could have had several more days in it! April came to work with me this morning, so she's pretty excited about that. Much more interesting than being at home. I got a note from Grace and Tim yesterday: "John Patrick Ernst was born at 10:03pm on Wednesday, April 6, 2005. He weighed 7 lbs 14 oz and is 20 inches long. Everyone is doing great and Grace's mom is here for the rest of the month to help out. Love, Grace and Tim" He looks like a really sweet guy...it's amazing to see photos of Grace as a mom! Joey came over yesterday, and he and Bryan went to the driving range and then I took him grocery shopping. I am a FUN older sister. Bryan has been starting to work on getting a website going so we'll be ready to post images when Junior comes along. Our little guy isn't moving all the time, but when I eat or lie down, he can make some pretty strong movements. Vicki's friend gave her a couple tubs of summer maternity clothes, and now that the warm weather is here, I can wear them. Today I found a pretty purple dress that still had the tags on it. I'm lucking out in the maternity

clothes department! Tonight I have another prenatal yoga class, on Wednesday we go to our second childbirth class... Starting to learn about all the things we need to know before our little guy comes:) Have a great week. Love, Althea

#### Week 29 Update:

How your baby's growing Your baby now weighs about 2 1/2 pounds and is a tad over 15 inches long from head to heel. His muscles and lungs are continuing to mature, and his head is growing bigger to accommodate his brain — which is busy developing billions of neurons. With this rapid growth, it's no surprise that your baby's nutritional needs reach their peak during this trimester. To keep yourself and him well nourished, you'll need plenty of protein, vitamin C, folic acid, iron, and calcium. (About 200 milligrams of calcium is deposited in your baby's skeleton — which is now hardening — every day.)

April 18

Week 30!

Happy Sunny April Day!

This month has been just beautiful, and the word is that the temperature today could get up to 80! I'm going to have a hard time staying at work this afternoon. I just had my 30 week doctor's appointment this morning. It takes all of 3 minutes...they weigh me (up two pounds in the last few weeks), take my blood pressure (steady at 95/60), listen to the heart beat (147 beats/min), measure my belly (30 cm from bottom to top), and ask if I have any questions. My doctor is due in about a month, but she still wants to see me one more time. I've got the names of a couple of her co-workers, though, so in a couple visits I'll be going to someone else. Bryan and I are in our third week of our childbirth class. It's a lot of fun, and I'm looking forward to going again on Wednesday. This week is kind of busy...I've got yoga tonight, our class on Wed., Joey's play on Thursday, and then on Friday I'm going over to Jack's house for the Wildflower weekend. We'll walk around and look at wildflowers. I'm looking forward to it! On Saturday night, we got the fun call that Vicki had delivered her baby. They named him Alexander Elkin Ivey, and he was 6 lbs, 15 oz; 20 inches long. Her labor was fast. She went to the hospital at 5 and was 8 cm dilated and delivered at about 9:30 - no drugs! She called Sara, my co-worker, at 10:30 to share the news, and Sara said she sounded great and very happy. I'm really looking forward to meeting the little guy! Hope you all have a great week. Love, Althea

BabyCenter week 30 update

<http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/130.html>

How your baby's growing: Your baby's a bit more than 15 1/2 inches long now, and she weighs almost 3 pounds. A pint and a half of amniotic fluid surrounds her, but that volume will decrease as she gets bigger and fills out your uterus. Her eyes open and close, she's able to distinguish between light and dark, and she can even follow a light source back and forth. Once she's born, she'll keep her eyes closed for a good part of the day. When she does open them, she'll respond to changes in light but will have a visual acuity of only 20/400 — which means she can only make out objects a few inches from her face. ("Normal" vision in adults is 20/20.)

How your life's changing: You may be feeling a little tired these days, especially if you're having any trouble sleeping. You might also feel clumsy, which is perfectly understandable. Not only are you heavier, your balance is off and your joints are loosened, thanks to pregnancy hormones. Those loose joints can actually cause your feet to grow a shoe size -permanently.

April 25

Week 31 and going on a trip

Happy Monday! I'm getting ready to leave the office for the week, and I just thought I'd send you this update quickly before I fly away. The last week has been good. Pretty uneventful. Our little guy is really making some strong movements. He's doing less kicking and more pushing. In fact, when Bryan and I went to the UW band concert last week, we couldn't believe how much we could feel him. I think we was trying to get out through the front:) I was out at Jack's last weekend for the annual wildflower walk. The weather was a bit chilly, but not too bad once we were walking. I didn't camp, though. Too cold for me! And early in the morning instead of going bird watching, I looked at the sun rise from out the window. Then I went bird watching when the sun was warming everything up.

Bryan and I had a nice day at home yesterday, and we went through about six tubs of baby clothes/toys/gear a friend brought over. We ended up returning nearly all of it. I can't imagine that a person needs so much STUFF to raise a baby. I think we'll get things as we need them, but I'd rather not feel over-run with equipment that I don't even know that we'll need. It sure is fun to look through things, though. And now we have some baby spoons, new outfits, and a mat for the baby to lie on and play with dangling toys.

I'm leaving for Washington DC this afternoon. I'll be lobbying and at meetings Tuesday through Thursday. On Friday, I plan to visit museums and play until Bryan flies in. We're looking forward to seeing Grace and Tim and Baby John on Saturday and Sunday. This is my last scheduled flight before Junior comes, and I'm looking forward to the trip. I've got a couple last things to finish up before I leave today, so I'll bid you a warm goodbye. Love, Althea

Week 31 Update from Babycenter.com

<http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/131.html>

How your baby's growing: This week, your baby measures about 16 inches long. He weighs a little over 3 pounds and is headed for a growth spurt. He can turn his head from side to side, and he's beginning to accumulate a layer of fat underneath his skin in preparation for life as a newborn. As a result, his arms, legs, and body are filling out. • Note: Experts say every baby develops differently — even in the womb. This developmental information is designed to give you a general idea of how your baby is growing.

How your life's changing: Have you noticed the muscles in your uterus tightening now and then? [I HAVEN'T YET] Some women feel these random contractions — called Braxton Hicks contractions — in the second half of pregnancy. Lasting from 30 to 60 seconds, they're nonrhythmic and irregular and, at this point in your pregnancy, they should be infrequent and not painful. (When you're within a few weeks of your due date, it's normal for Braxton Hicks contractions to become more frequent and even somewhat painful; in fact, they're often called "false labor" because sometimes it can be hard to tell them from the real thing.)

May 2

Week 32...two months to go:)

Happy May!

Bryan and I just got back from a great trip to Washington DC. I spent the first part of the week staying with my friend Kacy and going to meetings for the national Land Trust Alliance. Then on Friday evening, Bryan flew in and we had a great time visiting some museums, eating at fun restaurants, and staying with Grace and Tim and their new baby John Patrick. In DC, the flowers were blooming and the air was warm, and there was so much going on that we would have needed to stay for a year to see it all! We visited the Air and Space Museum and the new American Indian museum on Saturday morning. The International Spy Museum was too crowded and expensive. We had a great time holding and looking at baby John, and it was a lot of fun to get a sneak peak of what life is like a few weeks after a baby comes. Grace's mom had been staying with them until Saturday, so we were there at a time of transition. My friends from SNRE, Jennifer and Lara also came by, so it was great to see them too.

Our little baby keeps growing bigger. He's making lots of big movements and can really push hard sometimes. Today my ribs feel a bit like they're being pulled apart, and I can't say that the sensation is altogether comfortable. Our baby's doing quite a bit of traveling in utero. He's already been to Oregon, Washington, Texas, Kansas, Illinois, Virginia, Maryland, DC, and probably next weekend Indiana (briefly) and Michigan. I wanted to make a trip up to St. Paul to see Maretta at school, but I don't think that's going to happen! We're running out of time:)

I haven't been as ravenous the past couple weeks, and I've actually been less tired in the evenings (I can stay up until 10 sometimes!), so that has been nice. Bryan and I have an infant care class tonight at St. Mary's (our hospital), so that should be a good opportunity to check out the facilities and to practice washing and diapering a baby.

That's my news for this week. Hope all is well with you, and I'm going to be watching the skies and looking for some springtime weather. It IS May! Love, Althea

Week 32 Update from the BabyCenter

<http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/132.html>

How your baby's growing: By now, your baby probably weighs almost 4 pounds and is almost 17 inches long, taking

up a lot of space in your uterus. She has tiny toenails now, and her fingernails have grown in, too. Some babies have a head of hair already; others have only peach fuzz. The baby's irises can now dilate and contract in response to light. Due to the deposits of white fat underneath the skin the baby's skin is no longer red but pink.

How your life's changing: Your blood volume (the plasma plus red blood cells) is now about 40 to 50 percent greater than before you became pregnant to accommodate the needs of you and your baby. (This extra amount also helps make up for any blood you'll lose when giving birth.) You're also gaining a pound a week now, and roughly half of that goes right to your baby. With your uterus pushing up near your diaphragm and adding pressure on your abdomen, you may be dealing with heartburn [NOT YET] more often or feeling a little short of breath. To help with shortness of breath, try eating smaller quantities more often (rather than three daily feasts) and sleeping propped up. Those smaller meals should help with the heartburn, too.

As your baby grows, the increasing concentration of weight in your growing belly causes a change in your posture and a shift in your center of gravity. Plus, your abdominal muscles are stretching, hormones are making your ligaments more lax, and your growing uterus may even press on some nerves. All of this can contribute to low back pain.

May 10

Week 33 Update

Good morning!

It's a lovely May day. I got back from my trip to Ann Arbor at noon yesterday. It was a wonderful trip. I was so happy to get to visit with friends and co-workers, and it seemed like each half-day held a new reunion with a dear friend. Staying with Heather and Michael was a lot of fun. It had been too long since our last visit. And I hadn't seen Marcia since her baby Jordyn was born in October. I'm still smiling from all the good times I had. Then it was great to come back home to my boy and my home and to know that I'll be staying here without traveling for a long time. Bryan did some transformations to the basement bathroom while I was gone. He's really learning some plumbing techniques! He's also been our dandelion warrior and has been digging up the weeds with determination. Such a guy! Keeping our yard healthy and saving me from trying to bend and squat with my big belly.

I had a doctor's appointment on Friday. My belly is 33 cm from bottom to top. Right on track. Still at 17 lbs of weight gain. On Friday, he was head down with his back toward my right side, and his heart rate was 150 beats/min. My OB gave me some suggestions for baby doctors, so we have an interview with one in a couple weeks. My doctor is due to have her baby on May 13, so this was the last appointment I have with her. She referred me to another doctor, Gary Waters, so I hope I like him! I have my first appointment with him on Wed. May 18. Since the doctors rotate who is on call at the hospital at any time, there's only a 20 % chance that I'd have "my" doctor there to deliver the baby, so in some ways, it feels like it doesn't even matter who my actual doctor is. That's one reason we're planning on getting a doula (birthing assistant) to be with us at the birth. We think it will be nice to have someone experienced with natural childbirth who we know ahead of time to be there as an advocate for me and as a support for Bryan. Nurses can be great, but they switch shifts and don't necessarily know your birth plans. So finding a doula and writing up our birth plan are two things we're going to need to work on soon. Our child birth class has two sessions left, and we've had such a great time. The baby has been moving around, and when he pushes out it feels kind of like a rock. He seems to react when I rub or scratch on my belly, so we have fun doing that sometimes when I'm lying around. Hope you have a great week! Love, Althea

Week 33 BabyCenter Update

<http://www.babycenter.com/mybabycenter/133.html>

How your baby's growing: This week your baby weighs a little over 4 pounds and measures 17.2 inches from the top of his head to his heels. His skin is becoming less red and wrinkled, and while most of his bones are hardening, his skull is quite pliable and not completely joined. This will help him ease out of your relatively narrow birth canal.

How your life's changing: You may be waddling a bit now, as your baby fills out even more of your belly. It may be harder to sleep comfortably, too. For relief, try sleeping in a recliner or propping yourself in a semi-upright position in bed. You may be feeling some aches and even numbness in your fingers, wrists, and hands. Like many other tissues in your body, those in your wrist can swell, which can increase pressure in the carpal tunnel, a bony canal in your wrist. Nerves that run through this "tunnel" end up pinched, creating numbness, tingling, shooting or burning

pain, or a dull ache. Try wearing a brace or propping your arm up with a pillow when you sleep. If your work requires repetitive hand movements (at a keyboard or assembly line, for example), remember to stretch your hands when you take breaks.

### **Moving forward from a rough weekend (2005-05-31 18:19)**

The past three days were tough ones. Mom had a couple more procedures done, and at this point we're all learning as much about pancreatic cancer as we can.

On May 29, Dr. Baker did a procedure called a percutaneous transhepatic cholangiodrainage (PTCD) with biopsy. He was able to insert a tube in the center of Mom's abdomen that goes through her liver, down the bile duct toward the pancreas. He then inserted a drain so the bile that has been backing up the from the liver, gallbladder, and pancreas can drain to a bag outside her body. He also took a biopsy of the tumor that sits at the head of the pancreas.

Later that afternoon, Dr. Allen explained that the tumor is about 3x4 cm (medium-sized as he described it) and is located right at the head of the pancreas. The biopsy showed a mucin Adenocarcinoma tumor which means that it probably started in the pancreas.

This isn't the news that any of us wanted to hear. It's hard to treat pancreatic tumors. The tumor is encroaching on a major blood vessel (the superior mesenteric vein) making surgery very difficult.

Dr. Diggs, the oncologist talked to our whole family on Monday morning. He said that there are two doctors at the UW Hospital who may be able to do surgery to remove the tumor at this point. He and Dr. Gibson, the surgeon, are going to send Mom's films to them this week to see what they think. If surgery is not possible immediately, the primary treatment will probably be radiation and chemotherapy with the hopes of shrinking the tumor to the point that it can be removed.

They may also need to do additional endoscopic surgery to implant an internal stent so the bile can drain internally into the intestine. They'll also want to do laparoscopic surgery to look for other tumors in the abdomen.

Dr. Gibson kept Mom in the hospital on Monday in case the UW doctors would be able to transfer her directly to the UW on Tuesday. However, this morning they said that they wouldn't be able to see her until later in the week, so after a mind-bending weekend, she's back at home as of mid-day on Tuesday. She has an appointment scheduled on Friday morning with Dr. Webber at the UW. Hopefully, we'll know more after that, but who knows, it could be until next week before they run the next set of tests (MRI, catscans, ultrasounds) that need to be done.

It's been a completely surreal set of days and I know we're all still trying to absorb information. The doctors have been very helpful and informative, and I'm glad that Mom gets a chance to be home for a while until we take next steps.

I have lots more details on treatment options, and I'm looking into support systems for families struggling with cancer. I'm also learning how to talk about this and internalize it to my life. I know we all are. So this isn't a fun note to write, but I know that there's an amazing group of people out there who love Mom and who will be interested in following her condition. If you have questions, please give me a call.

At this point, we're glad that there are a variety of treatment options available, and we're moving forward

with a hopeful attitude.  
Althea

### Week 36 Update (2005-05-31 22:08)



He's almost 6 pounds and nearly full-term, and boy is he feeling big! We're four weeks from the due date!

### Week 36 Update from the Babycenter.com

**How your baby's growing:** Your baby is still putting on the pounds — about an ounce a day. She now weighs almost 6 pounds and is a little less than 19 inches long. She's shedding most of the downy covering of hair that covered her body as well as the vernix caseosa, the creamy substance that covered and protected her skin during its submersion in amniotic fluid. Your baby swallows both of these substances, along with other secretions, which will stay in her bowels until birth. This blackish mixture, called meconium, will become her first bowel movement.

At the end of this week, your baby will be considered full-term. (Babies between 37 and 42 weeks are considered full-term; a baby born before 37 weeks is pre-term and after 42 is post-term.) Most likely she's in a head-down position by now [HE IS], which is optimal for a smooth delivery, but if she isn't in the next week, your provider may suggest scheduling an "external cephalic version," which is a fancy way of saying she'll try to coax your baby into a head-down position manually, by manipulating her from the outside of your belly.

**How your life's changing:** While your baby continues to grow and crowd your internal organs, you may find that you're not as hungry as you were a few weeks ago. Smaller, more frequent meals are often easier to handle at this point. On the other hand, you may have less heartburn and have an easier time breathing when your baby starts to drop down lower in your pelvis [THIS HASN'T HAPPENED YET, BUT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT!]. This dropping — called lightening or engagement — is more likely to happen before labor if this is your first baby. When it does, though, you may feel increased pressure in your lower abdomen, making walking increasingly uncomfortable. Some women say it feels as though they're carrying a bowling ball between their legs, or as if the baby is going to fall out. (Don't worry, she won't!)

You might also notice that your Braxton Hicks contractions are a little more frequent now [THEY ARE, ESPECIALLY WHEN I WALK UP/DOWN STAIRS]. Be sure to review with your practitioner exactly when and where to call her when you think your labor has started. As a general rule, you should call when you start having regular contractions coming every five minutes for about an hour.

## 1.2 June

### No surgery for Mom now...a week until the next test (2005-06-03 16:18)

On Friday morning (June 3), Mom met with Dr. Sharon Weber, a doctor of surgical oncology at the University of Wisconsin Hospital. After looking at the CT scans that were sent from St. Mary's, Dr. Weber told us that it's her opinion that the tumor is currently inoperable. So our next step is to do a laparoscopy next Thursday to check for other tumors before beginning chemo and radiation.

The tumor (which I am considering naming Poco in order to encourage a tiny tumor with a slow growth habit) is in a part of the pancreas called the uncinate process. When it's in this location, it can be there for a while without exhibiting symptoms, which may be why it could get to be 4x3.7 cm in size before causing problems. It doesn't seem to have metastasized (spread to other parts of the abdomen), which is a good thing. However, the tumor (Poco) is classified as advanced as it involves about three centimeters of the superior mesenteric vein (SMV), and Dr. Weber thinks it is unlikely that any doctor would be willing to operate at this point.

"So what do we do next?" you ask? We need to do a laparoscopy to look for tumors that may have spread but didn't show up on the CT scan. We want to know this before we head into a chemo/radiation regime because radiation won't be effective if it has metastasized. Mom called and made an appointment for Thursday, June 9 to have this operation done (it will be an out-patient surgery).

We would also like to get a wire stent implanted so Mom's bile goes back to the GI track instead of draining externally. This would be another relatively minor surgery, and we still have to look into scheduling it.

Mom should be able to start chemo and/or radiation in the next few weeks. Depending on which course of action we take, the chemo/radiation regimes take around six weeks and then you wait another four weeks or so before doing a CT scan to see how much the tumor has shrunk. The goal of these treatments is to shrink Poco to the point that he can be removed (probably by Dr. Weber).

So that's our news right now. I won't have any further updates until after the laparoscopy results are back which won't be until next Friday at the earliest. Besides reeling from the magnitude of this news, Mom feels all right, and we're all pulling together to find our way through this maze. I know that we have a lot of people out there thinking of us and sending us their wishes and prayers. It is very much appreciated.

### Baby Dotzour: Week 37 Update (2005-06-06 13:15)



June 6: We've reached full term! Baby Dotzour is now big enough to be born, but we're planning on keeping him in for at least another couple weeks. All continues to be well with our pregnancy, and the nursery is nearly ready. We can't wait to meet him!!



How your baby's growing: Congratulations! Your pregnancy is now considered full term — meaning your baby is developmentally ready to handle life outside the womb. (Babies born before 37 weeks are pre-term and those born after 42 weeks are post-term.) Your baby probably weighs a little over 6 pounds at this point and measures between 19 and 20 inches, head to heel.

Many babies have a full head of hair at birth, with locks from 1/2 inch to 1 1/2 inches long. But don't be surprised if your baby's hair isn't the same color as yours. Dark-haired couples are sometimes thrown for a loop when their children are born blonds or redheads, and fair-haired couples have been surprised by Elvis look-alikes. And then, of course, some babies sport only peach fuzz.

How your life's changing: The next couple of weeks are a waiting game. Use this time to prepare your baby's nursery or to take care of tasks you may not get around to for a while after your baby's born. Take naps and catch up on your reading while you can.

You may be getting a lot more Braxton Hicks contractions now, and they may last longer and be more uncomfortable. Sometimes — when they start to come frequently — you may even think you're in labor.

### **Mom's laparoscopy has good results - no new tumors (2005-06-09 18:39)**

On Thursday, June 9, Mom had an endoscopic surgery called laparoscopy. The purpose was to look to see if the tumor at the head of the pancreas has spread to other portions of the abdomen. And we got good news! Dr. Gibson found no new tumors, and that means that Mom can start a combination of radiation and chemo soon.

Dr. Gibson reiterated that Mom's cancer, is a mucin andocarcinoma. He warned us that there's a high probability that the tumor has shed some microscopic cancer cells to other parts of the body. But the good news is that none have grown to the point that they were visible from today's procedure. Our hope is that chemotherapy will destroy any metastatic cells before they grow.

On Friday, Mom had surgery to have a permanent stent placed in the bile duct (which was being blocked by the tumor). Dr. Gibson compared the metal stent to a chinese finger trap (see a photo). They're keeping the external drain in until Monday (to make sure that the internal stent is working correctly), and then they'll take it out on Monday the 13th. This will mean she'll have to give up her external bile bag, which I'm sure she's become attached to over the last week (just kidding!).

She's also supposed to be meeting with Lisa, the data manager for the ECOG study that we're looking at right now for her chemo/radiation treatment. That appointment is scheduled for Tuesday the 14th. We should be able to get questions answered about her participation in that study during this meeting.

Dr. Zinda, an oncological radiologist will be meeting with Mom sometime next week to schedule a surgery to install the ports through which they will deliver the chemotherapy drugs. These are called venous access device (VAD) and are surgically implanted devices that provides long-term access to a major vein. Not a pleasant thing to look toward, but it will allow her to start her chemo treatments soon. It'll also mean she won't get poked with needles every time she goes in for treatment, which in general will be a very good thing. Here's more information and another good definition.

The following Friday, June 17, we're meeting with her oncologist, Dr. Diggs, to talk about treatment options.

I'm hoping that her treatment will begin the following week.

For those of you who would like more information on pancreatic cancer, I've found the National Cancer Institute to be a good source: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/pancreatic>

I've found that [breastcancer.org](http://breastcancer.org) is a good website in terms of providing lots of good, readable content on cancer treatment (esp. what to expect from chemotherapy).

Here's a list of clinical trials that Mom may be eligible for:

<http://www.cancer.gov/search/ResultsClinicalTrials.aspx?protocolsearchid=1657219>

Here's info on the treatment that her oncologist, Dr. Diggs, recommended.

<http://www.cancer.gov/search/ViewClinicalTrials.aspx?cdrid=258056&version=patient&protocolsearchid=1657219>

Also, here's a brief bio on Dr. Charles Diggs. and one for her surgeon who has been leading up her diagnosis and treatment, Dr. Scott Gibson.

### **Baby Dotzour: Week 38 Update (2005-06-15 09:18)**



Two weeks until Baby D is due! At my weekly appointment yesterday, the doctor said that he was still head down, heart rate was lower...around 130, he seems to be growing well, but my weight has been stable the last three weeks. I'm not as comfortable as I've been up until this point, but that's to be expected. Mostly feel like I have a bolder attached to my belly! We can't wait to meet him soon. He's due on the 27th.

**How your baby's growing:** Your baby has really fattened up. She likely weighs between 6 and 7 1/2 pounds now (boys tend to be slightly heavier than girls), and she's probably between 19 and 20 inches long. She has a firm grasp, which you'll soon be able to test with your pinky! Her organs are fully developed and in place, but her lungs and brain — though developed enough for her to function now — will continue to mature right through childhood.

**Wondering what color your baby's eyes will be?** You may not be able to tell right away. If your baby is born with brown eyes, they'll likely stay brown. If she's born with steel gray or dark blue eyes, they may stay gray or blue or turn green, hazel, or brown by the time she's 9 months old. That's because a child's irises (the colored part of the eye) may gain more pigment in the months after she's born, but they won't get "lighter" or more blue. (Green, hazel, and brown eyes have more pigment than gray or blue eyes.)

**How your life's changing:** It may be harder than ever to get comfortable enough to sleep well at night. Take it

easy through the day — this may be your last opportunity to do so for quite a while. [I continue to sleep just fine through the night...thank heavens!!!...but rolling from side to side results in a fair amount of grunting and groaning. I know what my horse felt like when she was really pregnant. And I understand the grunts!]

Keep monitoring your baby's movements, too. Though she's crowded, she should still be active.

Swelling of your feet is normal in these last weeks - [I've started to notice this especially when it's hot and humid. hmmm, it's been hot and humid a lot!]

Encourage your partner to relax and enjoy some activities he won't have time for after the baby arrives.

### **Internal stents are placed (2005-06-15 09:32)**

On Friday, June 9, Mom had an internal metal wire stent placed in her bile duct. The tumor at the head of the pancreas had blocked the bile duct, and the stent should keep the duct open so her liver and pancreas can drain like normal into the small intestine. Mom's body didn't react very well to this procedure, and they kept her in the hospital until Tuesday. On the 14th, doctors tested the bile duct and ended up inserting two additional stents. Mom went home later that day. She's not feeling well, however, and we're hoping that in a couple days her body will adjust to the poking and jostling it's been getting and she'll feel better.

After Friday's stent placement, Mom ran a high fever for a couple of days, had a moderate amount of pain, and felt nausea and gastrointestinal discomfort (which makes sense since the stent is pretty much in her intestine). They had expected to release her on Friday night, but it wasn't until Monday that she was feeling better.

They had a test scheduled for Tuesday, June 14, so on Monday, they decided to keep her in the hospital for another day. On Tuesday, a radiologist tested the stent by injecting contrast dye into the bile duct and using an x-ray to see how well the dye was able to travel throughout the system. Apparently they felt like the single stent wasn't working well enough because they added two more. Although she was in quite a bit of pain after this procedure, Mom felt well enough to go home on Tuesday night. As of Wednesday morning, however, she's still experiencing pain and continues to struggle with gastrointestinal discomfort and nausea. Hopefully her body will adjust in the next day or so.

We have an appointment with her oncologist, Dr. Diggs, on Friday, June 17. At this point, we'll be discussing treatment options. We've been doing a lot of reading and research, but if anyone has suggestions or input, please contact me by the 17th so we can take your input into consideration as we look at treatment options.

That's the update for now. Take care,  
Althea

## **We've identified a treatment strategy (2005-06-19 13:05)**

On Friday, June 17, we met with Mom's oncologist, Dr. Diggs, to talk about treatment options for dealing with her cancer. We came to the meeting having done a lot of research and full of questions about which treatment would be most appropriate for the stage and type of cancer Mom is facing. Dr. Diggs spent quite a while talking with us, and by the end of the meeting, we decided to go with the clinical trial: Gemcitabine and Radiotherapy Versus Gemcitabine, Fluorouracil, and Cisplatin Followed By Radiotherapy and Fluorouracil in Patients With Locally Advanced, Potentially Resectable Adenocarcinoma of the Pancreas

Early the week of June 20, Mom will be placed in one of the two treatment arms. She'll get a chemo port placed in her upper chest, and may be starting her treatment by Friday.

The data manager for the clinical trial is Lisa Peronto. She met with us after Dr. Diggs, and we liked her a lot. I think she'll help us navigate all the doctors and appointments and details of Mom's treatment, and it's good to know we'll have someone looking out for her and helping us by serving as a clearinghouse for our treatment questions.

She's planning to set up an appointment mid-week to have a catheter placed in Mom's upper chest for chemo treatments and blood drawings. It should be a day surgery. For more info on this type of catheter, see this website. Dr. Gibson (her surgeon) would normally be the one to do this procedure, but as he is out for the next couple weeks, Lisa was going to identify a different surgeon on his team to place the catheter. While I know she's not looking forward to the procedure, the catheter will keep the doctors from having to poke her for blood draws or chemo drugs during her treatment.

Sometime this week, they will also assign Mom to one of the two arms of the study. There isn't a clear "better" arm to be assigned to.

Here's how the study looks:

Arm A (standard therapy arm)

- Gemcitabine and radiation therapy once a week for six weeks
- Four to six weeks of no therapy
- CT scans to see if the tumor is resectable and if so, surgery (if it's not operable, potentially go back to the Gemcitabine and radiation therapy again.)
- After surgery, four to six weeks of recovery
- Gemcitabine once a week for two weeks followed by one week of rest. Repeat five times.

Arm B (the experimental arm)

- Gemcitabine days 1, 5, 29, 33 Cisplatin days 1-5 and 29-33 5-FU days 1-4 and 29-32 Erythropoietin day 1 of weeks 1-9
- Three weeks of no chemotherapy

- Radiation therapy and 5-FU for six weeks
- Four to six weeks of no therapy
- CT scans to see if the tumor is resectable and if so, surgery (if it's not operable, potentially go back to the chemotherapy followed by radiation).
- After surgery, four to six weeks recovery
- Gemcitabine once a week for two weeks followed by one week of rest. Repeat three times.

Once we know which arm of the study Mom is assigned to, I'll write up a calendar with her expected treatment schedule. The radiation therapy takes about 30 minutes per day. Chemo in Arm A takes about one hour per day and in Arm B takes about four hours per day.

Breastcancer.org

has some nice info on their website about what to expect from chemotherapy. Lisa did give us a gentle warning that this treatment regime isn't an easy one and that Mom is likely to experience nausea, hair loss, loss of appetite, and fatigue. The chemotherapy also may cause low white blood cell count and low platelet counts (making her more susceptible to infection and bruising).

At this point, Mom's Cancer Antigen (CA) 19-9

count is 450. The average is 37, and the standard for resectable tumors is under 1000. We'll be tracking this number through her treatment and will be hoping that chemo and radiation help to drop it down. It can serve as an indicator of how well the treatment is working.

During the meetings with Dr. Diggs, we talked about two alternative drugs, Avastin (bevacizumab) and Erbatix. Both of these are currently being used to fight other kinds of cancers and may have applications for pancreatic cancer, but it isn't clear that either drug benefits pancreatic cancer. They work by cutting off the blood flow to the tumor. For more info on Avastin, [click here](#). For a general article on these studies, [click here](#).

I also have the results from a variety of clinical trials that used these drugs and can give you links if you're interested.

OK, enough info for today! Take care,  
Althea

### **Baby Dotzour: Week 39 Update (2005-06-20 13:52)**



June 20. I cannot believe that Baby D's due date is just seven days from now!

Bryan and I celebrated our 6th anniversary on Sunday, which was a lot of fun. We went to a hot and sunny Mallards

baseball game here in town. I had a good time at my 10th high school reunion on Saturday night. Anne came over and painted a sunflower on my enormous belly. Baby has been growing ever bigger, and with hot weather in the forecast this week, I imagine I'll be ready to deliver whenever he wants to join us. Bryan is beside himself with anticipation about meeting him, and each day we're getting closer to seeing his little feet instead of feeling them push out of my side:) My next (and last scheduled) doctor's appointment is on Wednesday.

#### Babycenter.com Update

**How your baby's growing:** Your baby's ready to greet the world!

He continues to build a layer of fat to help control his body temperature after birth, but it's likely he already measures about 20 inches and weighs a bit over 7 pounds. (Boys tend to be slightly heavier than girls.) Your baby's organs are fully developed and in place, and the outer layers of skin are sloughing off as new skin forms underneath.

**How your life's changing:**

At each visit, your midwife or doctor will do an abdominal exam to check your baby's growth and position. She might also do an internal exam to see whether you've started effacing (when the cervix thins out) or dilating (when the cervix opens). If the week passes and your baby stays put, don't panic. Only 5 percent of babies are born on their scheduled due date. And your baby can't make you wait indefinitely for his arrival. If you go past your due date, your provider will schedule you for fetal testing (usually a sonogram) after 40 weeks to ensure that it's safe to continue the pregnancy. If you don't go into labor on your own, most practitioners will induce labor when you're between one and two weeks overdue.

Pregnant women on television sitcoms always have their water break dramatically — in the middle of a crowded room, of course — just before going into labor.

Don't worry about a similar scenario happening to you. Membranes rupture before the beginning of labor in less than 15 percent of pregnancies, and it's not normally an enormous gush — usually a small gush or a slow leak. In any case, if your water does break (or you even suspect you might have a leak), call your doctor or midwife right away, but stay calm — it may be hours before your first contraction.

#### **Welcome Baby Andrew!! (2005-06-24 13:59)**

He's Here!! Andrew Gordon Dotzour was born on June 22 at 6:14 am. He weighed 7 pounds, 3 ounces and is 19 inches tall.

Mom, Dad, and Baby all are doing well. Delirious:)



For some starter photos of our little guy, visit the photo gallery.

As we drove to the hospital the night before, there was a lovely full moon low in the sky. It was also the longest day of the year. An auspicious day!

I started having contractions on Monday night about 7 pm. They weren't regular or progressive but continued through the night. On Tuesday morning, I stayed home from work...not knowing if the contractions would fade away or develop into active labor. Bryan went to work in the morning and worked from home in the afternoon...by mid-afternoon it seemed like maybe we were on our way toward labor...contractions were about 5 minutes apart and lasting 45 seconds. Around 8 pm, we called Laura, our birthing assistant, and asked her to come over. The three of us headed in to the hospital at about 10 pm. Active labor continued through the night, and after a bit over an hour of pushing, little Andrew was born at 6:14 am on Wednesday, June 22. Well, Baby Dotzour was born at 6:14. We didn't name him until the next day.

What a wonderful and life-altering experience. Bryan and I both can't believe he's finally with us.

We stayed at St. Mary's until Friday, and now that we're home with him, we just can't stop looking at him. That and sleep is I think what will make up our hours for the next few days and weeks. Thanks to the multitude of good wishes and loving thoughts and prayers that have been sent our way these past weeks and months. We are so blessed to have this miraculous little guy in our life.

Love,  
Althea

### **Mom has started her chemo treatment (2005-06-27 18:59)**

June 27: It's been a month now since Mom Babler was diagnosed with cancer, and this morning, she started her chemotherapy treatment. She'll be receiving chemo infusions each day this week. For background info, see "Mom's Health Update" under the news section.

## **1.3 July**

### **July 3 Baby update (2005-07-03 14:29)**



Little Andrew is now 11 days old. We're enjoying each moment with him, and at the present moment, I'm learning how to type on my laptop while holding a sleeping infant:)

Squirmy (as we mostly call him these days) had his first doctor's appointment on Tuesday last week. He had already eclipsed his birth weight, and he weighed in at 7 pounds, 6 ounces. A champion eater, he may be taking after his parents... We're getting not quite enough sleep, but not too bad either. Andy is a cooperative baby (so far!), and he's just so fun to look at! I put up some new photos from the past week in our gallery. All the photos of him are in the Summer album.



Weekly update from BabyCenter.com

Week 1 -

How your baby's growing: This week your newborn continues to adjust to her new world, which she finds perhaps a bit too noisy and well-lit for her taste. But she's coming along. You'll notice her limbs move in a jerky, uncoordinated way. Soon, probably by the end of the month, her movements will become more fluid as her muscle control matures. Sucking and chewing on her hands are her main activities for the moment.

Is your newborn a noisy breather? Lots of air passing through very small airways clogged with lint from blankets, clothing, and dust is the culprit much of the time. For the most part, you don't need to worry; she isn't likely to have a cold at this young age. She's just trying her best to breathe.

### **July 8 Update: Mom's in the hospital recouping from chemotherapy (2005-07-08 14:01)**

My mom started her chemotherapy treatment on Monday, June 27.

Each day that week, she went in for a two hour infusion of gemcitabine. She felt pretty normal most of the week, but as the doctors warned, days 7-10 after starting the treatment were rough. She experienced some degree of fatigue, but the nausea was also pretty bad. To the frustration of all of us who love her, she was also dealing with some really painful mouth sores called mucositis.

Dad took her in to get infusions of saline solution which were supposed to help her body flush the chemo drugs and help with the nausea.

On Wednesday (July 6), the doctors decided to admit her so she could receive continuous saline infusions and get treated with IV antibiotics for a fever she developed. At this point, she's feeling markedly better, but we expect her to stay in the hospital until Sunday.

**July 8 Baby Update (2005-07-08 14:18)**



Bryan and I have been having a wonderful time getting to know our precious little baby. A couple days ago, we took him for his first visit to Olbrich Botanical Gardens (see photos in the gallery under Summer/Trip to Olbrich Gardens). I think he liked hearing the birds and feeling the sunshine. His umbilical cord fell off too, so he's pretty much an old man now.

He had his first bath in the tub this week, and he seemed fascinated by the whole experience. We held his head, and the rest of his body just floated in the water. I think we'll like bath time.

He continues to eat every couple hours round the clock, but so far, he's still a very happy and peaceful baby. We're looking forward to a visit with Uncle Ben and Aunt Melanie and "Granny Lu" and "Granddad" starting on Sunday!

Baby Center.com 2-week update

Comfortably curled

Because he was curled up inside your uterus until recently, your newborn baby will probably look "scrunched up" for a while, with his arms and legs not fully extended. He may even appear bowlegged. Don't worry. He'll stretch out, little by little, and by the time he reaches his half birthday, he'll be fully unfurled! In the meantime, as he adjusts to life outside the warm, safe confines of your womb, he may enjoy being swaddled.

By the end of his first month, your baby may lift his head briefly — and maybe turn it from side to side — when he's lying on his stomach. Jerky movements give way to more fluid ones as his nervous system and muscle control mature. Still, your baby's primitive reflexes, such as sucking and chewing on his hands, remain dominant.

### Ruled by hunger and sleep

Food is the most important thing in your newborn's life, with sleep running a close second. Most newborns will eat every two to three hours around the clock. Sleeping schedules are equally intermittent and quite variable from one infant to another. Most newborns sleep for a total of 16 to 17 hours in a 24-hour period, but that's usually broken up into eight or so naps. By the end of the first month your baby may have developed something of an eating and sleeping pattern. But don't count on it; you may not notice real regularity for months.

### Crying is his main form of communication

Having undergone the trauma of birth, your baby is now trying to deal with an onrush of stimulation. You may not be able to detect much of a personality just yet, as he spends his time moving in and out of several different states of sleepiness, quiet alertness, and active alertness. Although the only way he knows to communicate is by crying, you can communicate with him through your voice and your touch. Most babies love to be held, caressed, kissed, stroked, massaged, and carried. He may even make an "ah" sound when he hears your voice or sees your face.

### He only has eyes for you

Your baby's sight is still pretty fuzzy. And since his range of vision is just about 12 inches or so, he can see your face clearly only when you're holding him close. Studies show that newborns prefer human faces to all other patterns or colors. (High-contrast items, like a checkerboard, are next in line.) Give him plenty of opportunity to study your features by gazing at him from a close distance.

### Learning begins immediately

You may notice short periods of time when your newborn is quiet and alert. This is prime time for learning. Use these intervals to get better acquainted with your child — talk to him, sing to him, give him a tour of the pictures on the walls of your house. But if you try to interact with him and he doesn't seem receptive, don't insist. He may have gotten sleepy or moved into a state of active alertness (when he's working on new physical tricks).

Even this early, babies can recognize faces and gestures intuitively — and sometimes even imitate them. Give

your newborn a chance to imitate your facial expressions by putting your face close to his and sticking out your tongue or raising your eyebrows a few times. Repeat it. Then give him some time to mimic your gesture. Even if he doesn't copy you yet, he's keeping close tabs — and learning.

### Newborn play

Mobiles with high-contrast patterns and books with photos of babies' faces will captivate your newborn. So will his own reflection, so you may want to prop an unbreakable mirror next to him, or sit him in front of your mirror with you when you do your hair. A play gym with plenty of compelling things to watch, swipe at, and listen to will give your baby practice with arm, hand, and finger coordination skills — and make lying down less boring. In the first few months, he won't move his arms purposefully to reach for particular objects — this sort of movement comes later, in a couple of months.

### Remember, your baby is an individual

Each baby is unique and meets physical milestones at his own pace. Developmental guidelines are just yardsticks of what your baby has the potential to accomplish — if not right now, then soon.

### **Mom's feeling much better (2005-07-13 21:09)**

July 13: Mom has made it through the effects of her first chemo treatment, and she's feeling much more like herself again. She came home from the hospital on Sunday, and she's been looking, acting, and feeling much better. Hooray! We got together with Mom and the rest of the family on Sunday when Mom and Dad Dotzour and Ben and Melanie were in town. For photos, visit the most recent photo album  
Tomorrow, Mom, Joey, and I are going to go look at Joey's senior pictures. Mom doesn't start his next round of chemo until a week from next Monday (July 25).

**Wonderful visit with Mom and Dad and Ben and Melanie (2005-07-13 21:23)**



July 13: Today, little Andrew is three weeks old. It's hard to believe! He's still very little and kissable. According to our home measurements a couple days ago, Andrew is 20.5 inches long and weighs 9 pounds. That's up an inch and a half and a pound and a half since he was born!

We had a wonderful visit with Aunt Melanie and Uncle Ben and Mom and Dad Dotzour over the past several days. Photos of their visit and of Andrew doing various cute things like crying and looking at stuffed bunnies are available in the most recent album in the Summer album in our gallery ([here](#)).

**July 22 Update: About ready to start the next round... (2005-07-22 22:48)**

Mom's been feeling really good this past week. She had a cat scan and an appointment with Dr. Diggs (her oncologist) today. The cat scan reviewed her entire torso and didn't find any additional tumors. "Poco" the pancreatic tumor hasn't changed in size.

Dr. Diggs decreased her chemo drug dosage which we hope will in turn decrease the side effects she experiences.

The next round of chemo starts on Monday (the 25th) and goes through the week. If things progress as they did last time, she'll feel OK all week and will have a rougher week starting on the 31st. I'll update this website to let you know how things go.

### **Andrew is one month old! (2005-07-22 23:03)**

July 22: As hard as it for me to believe, Andrew is one month old today. On Tuesday, I went to a great parents group and met a bunch of really nice other moms. I weighed Andrew and was shocked to find out that he now weighs 10 lbs! I was so surprised that I took off all his clothes and re-weighed him. Still 10 lbs 0 oz. He's also 21.5 inches long. That's up from 7 lbs 3 oz and 19 inches at birth. This little guy is growing fast!  
Newest photos are up in the gallery

### **Babycenter.com Week 4 Update**

Head's up!

Your baby's neck muscles are getting stronger, which allows him to hold up his head for short periods. He can hold it up for a few moments while lying on his stomach, for example, and he may even be able to turn it from side to side. He may be able to hold it up when he's in a car seat or front carrier, especially if he has lots of support and you use special baby headrests designed to help him in those situations.

**Andrew's five week update (2005-07-27 17:13)**



July 27: Andrew is five weeks old today. For him, there are milestones every week! We went shopping last weekend with Maretta, and after screaming until I found a dressing room in which to change and nurse him, he slept all afternoon in his sling while we wandered the mall. We went to our parents group again on Tuesday at Happy Bambino, and I had a wonderful time meeting and getting to know other moms with little babies. Andrew is the youngest again:)

He got to meet his Great Uncle Kirk who was up for a visit from Texas.

We're keeping busy and are out running around most every day. The heat finally broke (it was nearly 100 on Sunday!), and today we enjoyed a long walk around the neighborhood. Andrew held on to the edge of his sling and stayed awake the whole time. April had fun too.

That's our news for now! Here's a link to this week's photos.

Babycenter.com update



How your baby's growing: That smile lighting up your baby's face — and your own — may be the real thing. You can tell it's a social smile (as opposed to gas) if he uses his entire face to tell you he's pleased. Though babies will smile only when they're ready, you can get yours there faster by cuddling, tickling, and playing with him. [NO SMILES FROM LITTLE ANDREW YET, BUT I'LL BE SURE TO UPDATE WHEN THEY START APPEARING!]

By this time your baby can focus both eyes on an object and has begun to prefer more complex designs, colors, and shapes. He can track movement, which means that a simple rattle passed in front of his face can transfix him. Or you can play eyes-to-eyes — move very close to his face and slowly nod your head from side to side. He'll follow you raptly, and you may even get another smile, or chuckle, out of him. [HE'S REALLY GETTING GOOD AT LOOKING AT THINGS. HE LOVES LOOKING AT TREES OUT THE WINDOW OR AT PHOTOS ON THE WALL. NOT SURE IF HE LIKES THE CONTRAST OF THE FRAME AGAINST THE WALL OR THE PICTURES THEMSELVES. HE IS ALSO STARTING TO BE ABLE TO SWITCH HIS FOCUS FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER...BUT IT TAKES A LOT OF CONCENTRATION!]

### **July 27 Update: Chemo round 2 (2005-07-27 17:21)**

Mom started her second round of chemo on Monday. Her dosage was decreased this week, so we're hoping that the side effects (which should really start manifesting themselves this weekend) will be less severe. She's going in to the clinic every morning for 2-3 hours of infusions. Then she has a little machine she carries around with her that gives her a continuous infusion all week.



She continues to feel good this week, and after her final treatment on Friday, she has three weeks off before she



begins six weeks of radiation combined with continuous infusion of the 5-FU chemo drug. Her brother came up from Texas to visit, and they had a fun time traveling around to neighborhoods where they grew up together. That's the update for now!

### **Our Pooch is Sick (2005-07-29 17:42)**

Just after Andrew was born, we discovered a lump on April's nose.

It was about the size of a walnut and was located on her gums just above her right canine tooth. On Monday (July 25), she had surgery to have the lump removed. We were hoping it was an infected abscess on the tooth, but it turns out that it was a tumor. Got the news from the vet today that it was a fibrosarcoma.

This type of cancer doesn't tend to metastasize (spread), but it does have a fairly high rate of reoccurrence. From doing a brief tour of info on the web, it looks like surgery (which she has already had) and radiation are the most common treatment options. We should be talking with April's vet about her treatment and prognosis.

We're sad to know that our puppy is sick, but she's feeling great now, so we'll just take a page from April's book and enjoy today with as much vigor as sleep deprived new parents can muster.

## **1.4 August**

### **Relay for Life (2005-08-01 13:29)**



Hello everyone. This is Joe, Althea's youngest brother.

Since those reading this website have recently been touched by my mother's illness, I thought you might be the people to ask for some help. On August 12, the American Cancer Society is holding a large fundraiser at my high school's track. The Relay for Life is an 18 hour event where team members walk around the track from 6 pm to noon the following day. The community comes together to hold candle light vigils, celebrations for survivors, and other activities in memory or support of someone with cancer. This year, I joined our National Honors Society's Relay for Life team. As a group, we raise money, which we then donate to the American Cancer Society. This is where you come in.

Donations of 10 or 20 dollars would be greatly appreciated.

Checks can be made out to the American Cancer Society. Please send whatever you're willing to give to this address:

Joseph Babler  
4575 Dennis Drive

Madison, WI 53704

For more information on Relay for Life, go to [www.cancer.org/Relayonline](http://www.cancer.org/Relayonline).

This event takes place on August 12th, and thank you in advance for your support.

Joe Babler

**Andrew's six week update (2005-08-01 13:31)**



August 4: It's been a fun week! Little Andrew is becoming ever more aware of his surroundings, and he's really starting to make eye contact and to be entranced by toys and wall hangings and lights. He smiled at me last weekend for the first time, but that miracle hasn't yet repeated itself. The photo on the right captures a fleeting sleep-smile...a nice idea of what smiles-to-come might look like. I added about 20 photos of Andrew this week to the gallery.

In the past few days he has started "talking" a bit by saying ah-goo. He's staying awake for hours at a time and spends quite a bit of that time interested in the world around him. The rest of the awake time is eating and fussing and getting his diaper changed.

Last week Andrew hit some sort of a growth spurt, and it felt like he ate constantly! I think he wanted to nurse every 20 minutes. His night feedings were close together too. But it just lasted a few days.

Last night he slept from 10-2 and then from 2:30 to 4:30 and then from 5 to 7. That's been about his standard sleep/wake cycle except that the first chunk is getting longer. He used to wake up at midnight, but these days he's sleeping for 3-4 hours straight, which feels incredible. I almost felt like getting up for the day at 2 am:)

We weighed him at our mother/baby hour at Happy

Bambino on Tuesday, and he came in at 11 lbs, 1 oz. I checked out a growth chart, and that puts him at the mean weight for his age (see a growth chart). We measured him, and I think he's 21 or 21.5 inches long. He's on the shorter side for his age, coming in at the 25 percentile.

We've been pretty busy this past week. Yesterday we went to Olbrich gardens with a few friends from our mom-baby group and then had them over to our house for lunch. We went to Concert on the Square both last Wednesday and this Wednesday. This afternoon we drove down to Monroe so Grandma and Grandpa Babler could meet little Andrew. See here for fun photos.

On Friday we go to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River for the weekend.

We're really looking forward to it! That's Andrew's six week update. Have a great week:)

Althea

BabyCenter.com Six week update

By now roughly half of all babies recognize their parents and openly prefer Mom and Dad to strangers. Your baby may actually smile when she sees you and coo and kick with pleasure.

In general, she's become more sensitive to her surroundings. If you ring a bell, she'll respond in some way by starting, crying, or even quieting. She's beginning to take a real interest in music, whether it's you singing to her or classical music coming from the radio. She notices things more acutely, too — staring intently at a plush toy, for instance, placed in front of her. For parents, it's a gratifying experience, especially coming as it does after weeks of diapering, feeding, bathing, kissing, and cuddling with little response.

#### **August 4 Update: Chemo side-effects not bad (2005-08-04 21:37)**

Mom finished her second round of chemotherapy on Friday (July 29). She went into the clinic every morning for 2-4 hours of infusion. They decreased the concentration of the chemo drugs from the first round, and that's meant that this week the side-effects are much less debilitating than they were for round one. She's been experiencing some nausea and fatigue, but those effects seem quite manageable. Mon-Wed. this week she went into the clinic for infusions of saline to help her body flush the chemo drugs and help her feel perkier.

She's up and about and is planning on participating in our annual pilgrimage out to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River this weekend. I'm sure to have lots of photos from that trip sometime next week.

Mom has a break from her treatments until August 22. Then she starts radiation in combination with continuous infusion of chemo. That takes place daily for six weeks (through September). More details to come on that new

adventure as we get closer. In the meantime, Mom should be feeling increasingly better. Just in time to enjoy these last lovely weeks of pure summer.

### **Weekend at Jack's was great! (2005-08-07 19:03)**

August 7: We just got back from a wonderful weekend at Jack's house on the Wisconsin River. We had 14 people there this year.

Mom and Andrew and I stayed home during the annual float this time, but that didn't diminish the fun we all had. Photos of the weekend are in the gallery.

### **Andrew's Seventh Week Update (2005-08-09 22:13)**



August 11 Update: It's been a busy week, and I'm now typing with Andrew sleeping on my lap and the laptop perched on my knees. It works! We had a great time at our annual pilgrimage to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River. The prairie was just beautiful, and the stars were unbelievably clear and plentiful. Southeast Wisconsin is a fantastic corner of the earth. Photos are available in the gallery.

Andrew did a major amount of eating during week five, and the past week, I imagine he was doing a lot of growing because he has been unusually fussy. It's been challenging to have our happy baby become a grouchy baby, but I think it's temporary. The past few days he's been having awake-and-content times, so that's been a welcome change. I have just a few photos up this week. They're in the gallery.

We're off to Wichita on an airplane on Friday morning. Should be a really fun trip!

Lots of little fun things going on this week. Andrew slept in his own crib several times this week. He even has been letting us put him down while he's still awake and he sometimes will sooth himself to sleep. He's still eating every 2-3 hours in the night. Sometimes we'll get a four hour stretch, but in general that's working alright.

On Monday we went shopping with my mom most of the day. Andrew did a great job. We found a big-boy car seat for him, and the cover is just perfect. I thought we should wait until Christmas, but Mom went ahead and got it for him now. There's a photo of him in it in the gallery. It's fun to imagine how big he'll be when he outgrows

that seat!

On Tuesday we went to our Happy Bambino mom's group again. Had a great time and then went out to lunch with several girls afterwards. Mom and her friend Mary came by our place in the afternoon. Mary brought a basket of fun gifts for Andrew including some great bibs that she sewed. She was really impressed by the quilt that LuAnn made for Andrew.

On Wednesday, I went into work and had lunch with some of my co-workers. It was wonderful to see them all again. Then Andrew and I walked down State Street to the Union to pick up Marettta from work. We ran some errands together (which included stopping at Coldstone Creamery for ice cream) and she came over for dinner and a movie.

Now it's Thursday. I spent some time packing for our trip this weekend, but Andrew hasn't given me much time to work on anything else. He wants to sleep on my lap, NOT in his cradle, crib, or our bed. I got some new books to read. Last weekend I read *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini and *really* enjoyed it. The sequel comes out in a couple weeks, so to tide me over until then, I got *Trickster's Choice* by Tamora Pierce.

I'm sure that's more info than almost anyone wanted to know about my week. We're off to Wichita tomorrow morning, and it should be a lot of fun! Andrew's first plane ride:)

Love,  
Althea

Here's the last weekly update from BabyCenter.com. From now on, they have monthly updates:

Does your baby coo at you when you pick him up in the morning?

[ANDREW IS HAPPIEST IN THE MORNINGS. HE'S STARTING TO COO AND GOO AT US SOMETIMES. IT'S THE SWEETEST SOUND!] Researchers say 50 percent of babies this age recognize their own parents, and a few even reward them with a big gummy grin. Recognizing Mom and Dad is just one sign that your baby is becoming more attuned to what's going on around him.

Your baby's head is fairly steady now and she's able to exercise more motor control over her feet and hands instead of just swinging them wildly. To see this new skill in action, hold a toy or rattle up in front of your baby and watch her grab for it. Don't forget to cheer her when she gets it. She'll thrive on your encouragement for the rest of her life! [ANDREW'S NOT QUITE READY TO GRAB FOR THINGS YET. HE LOOKS TOWARD VOICES AND FOUND HIS THUMB ONCE THE OTHER DAY. I'VE EVEN SEEN HIM REACHING TOWARD HIS STUFFED ANIMALS WE KEEP BY THE CHANGING TABLE, BUT HE HAS YET TO GRAB A TOY:]

How your baby's growing: Your baby has lost his pinched newborn look and appears steady and alert when held upright. [THIS LITTLE GUY LOVES TO PRACTICE STANDING. SOMETIMES IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT WILL KEEP HIM FROM CRYING.] When on his tummy, he's able to lift his head and chest for short periods, almost as if he's doing mini-pushups. [ANDREW ENJOYS HIS TUMMY TIME] He might even be able to roll from back to front or front to back. [NOT YET! AND I HOPE HE HOLDS OFF A WHILE LONGER. I'LL HAVE TO WATCH HIM MORE CLOSELY WHEN HE STARTS MOVING!]

He's tuning in to you more each day. When you speak, he may stop sucking his thumb or interrupt a feeding to listen to you. [HE'S STARTING TO DO THIS ONCE IN A WHILE. IT'S REALLY SPECIAL!]

Use your voice to connect with him. Repeat his coos and noises. Narrate your actions — speaking to your baby stimulates language development and is comforting. Make him the center of conversation. When you're with friends, include him and let him hear the richness of human interaction. He'll soon start to make all sorts of different noises himself.

### **Aug. 11 Update: Mom's feeling great (2005-08-11 17:26)**

We're all really enjoying these days. Mom's last round of chemo went really smoothly, and she's been feeling like herself.

It's a relief to be well-past the treatment decision-making, so we're in a comfortable place where we're just ignoring the fact that she's sick (because she sure doesn't seem sick), and we're all just going about our day-to-day activities and enjoying spending time together. Speaking of which, it's been great to be home this summer! I get to hang out with Mom quite a bit, and we always have a good time together. They get to watch April while Bryan, Andrew, and I go to Wichita for the weekend.

The next treatment step is radiation and continuous chemotherapy.

That starts on Monday, August 22 and runs for six weeks. The main side-effect they warn of is fatigue, which increases over the course of the treatment. More details when we start that adventure!

### **Andrew's Week 8 update (2005-08-23 21:13)**



Andrew is two months old! He had his doctor's appointment on Monday, and he seems to be growing right on track. The vital statistics: weight - 12 lbs, 10 oz; height - 23 in; head circumference - 40 cm. That put him at the 73rd percentile in weight, 64th percentile in height, and 52nd percentile in head circumference.

He's been having a pretty good week in terms of evening fussiness, which makes his mama and papa breathe more easily:)

We went to Wichita to see his great-grandparents and great-aunts and uncles. We had a fabulous time, and he was as quiet as a sleeping baby on the airplane flights. Photos of our weekend are available in our gallery. We haven't taken many photos in the last week, but a few are available in the gallery.

### **BabyCenter.com Two Month Update**

#### **The first real smiles**

This month your baby will reward all your loving care with a beaming, toothless, just-for-you smile. This will probably disarm you, even if you've just had your worst night yet. For Ron Heckman, a new father in Piedmont, California, that first smile from his 6-week-old daughter, Hadley, brought tears to his eyes. "It was a lousy day at work," he recalls. "I was sleep-deprived and the commute traffic that day was incredibly thick. When I finally got home and my wife

handed me the

baby, who looked straight at me and smiled this gorgeous all-gums grin, I remember thinking, 'She knows me' — and nothing else mattered."

A growing preference for complex designs

By 2 months of age your baby will begin to move beyond his early preferences for two-tone objects toward more detailed and complicated designs, colors, and shapes. Show your baby — and let him touch — a wider variety of objects now. Good choices include plastic cookie molds and soft balls.

Sleeping for longer chunks of time

If your baby is sleeping through the night now, you're one of the lucky few. Most babies still want a middle-of-the-night feeding at 2 months.

But the good news is, he should be sleeping and staying awake for longer intervals instead of cycling back and forth so much. Most 2-month-olds have two to four long sleep periods and as many as ten hours a day when they're awake.

Movements are less jerky

He's no Fred Astaire yet, but your little guy is now coordinating his movements better. You'll notice that the jerky arm and leg movements of his newborn days have given way to smoother, more circular motions.

While in the early days grabbing was mostly involuntary and instinctual, your 2-month-old is also able to purposely grab objects now.

### **August 23 Update: Zap it with radiation! (2005-08-23 21:40)**

After three weeks of "recovery time" from the second round of chemotherapy, Mom started radiation on Monday. She'll be going in for a quick radiation treatment five days a week for the next six weeks. Sounds like she experienced some nausea after the first day's treatment, but a miracle anti-nausea drug did the trick.

In general, she's feeling good and is enjoying a fun-filled August. It's been a lot of fun to be off on maternity leave and spending lots of time together. Maretta goes back to college on Labor Day weekend, and the Babler household will go back down to one kid again. Joey is going to be visiting colleges this fall.

Hard to believe!

## 1.5 September

Andrew's 12 week update (2005-09-12 08:12)



Andrew is 12 weeks old this week! Photos from September 4-11 are in the new Fall album of the Gallery ([click here](#)). Photos from late August including a visit from Granny Lu are in the summer album ([click here](#)).

Andrew has developed so many new skills these past few weeks. He can reach for toys (every once in a while) and pull them toward him. His smiles are coming more frequently, and he's engaging more and more with the people and environments around him. He's wearing his 3-6 month-old clothes now, and he weighs 13 lbs 10 oz...and ever growing boy!

I go back to work on Sept. 15, and we've been doing trial runs of day care so he can get to know Karen and they can start to develop a relationship.

Last weekend we had a picnic with some of our new friends. Photos are in the gallery.

### September 14 Update: Half way through radiation (2005-09-14 12:15)

Mom has completed three weeks out of the six weeks of radiation/continuous chemo infusion. She goes into the clinic each morning for a dose of radiation and some time putting together the puzzle in the waiting room. On Monday mornings, she also gets her chemo pump refilled for the week. It's stored in a little case that she carries around her waist.

Mom and Joey took Maretta up to college over Labor Day weekend, and Joe started school again as well (he's a senior this year!).



The radiation and chemo are starting to demonstrate some of the side effects that we were warned about. Mom is starting to feel more fatigued, she has some hand and foot pain, and the mouth sores are coming back (she jokes that she has hoof and mouth disease). But she still describes these side effects as tolerable (which is good since there are still a few weeks to go). She has a great attitude. Her doctor said he wishes he could bottle it.

### **Five weeks of radiation was too much (2005-09-22 06:37)**

September 22: Mom checked in to St. Mary's hospital yesterday so she can get continuous infusion of iv fluids to help her body recuperate from the nasty chemo side-effects. She's been feeling side-effects for the last week, but in the past several days the nausea didn't allow her to keep down any nutrition. Early in the week she went into the clinic to get fluids, and they stopped her continuous infusion of the 5-FU chemo drug that she's been on since Aug. 23.

She did radiation on Monday (and I think on Tuesday), but then on Wednesday she was just feeling so bad that they decided she's be best off in the hospital for a few days.

The doctor said that she'd made it further on this treatment than anyone else who he had treated had, so that just goes to show how nasty these drugs are on a person's system. She's going to be sleeping lots and regaining her health over the next couple days. I'm out of town until Monday, but I'll put up another update then. Mom is still in good spirits, and I don't think there's anything she really needs right now except to rest and get those drugs flushed out of her system. Let's hope the 5-FU was as nasty to the tumor as it has been the rest of her systems!

### **Andrew is three months old! (2005-09-22 06:48)**

Sept. 22: We woke up singing happy birthday to our little guy who is now three months old. He's over 14 lbs, and last night (I almost feel like whispering this) he slept over seven hours. I haven't had seven hours of uninterrupted sleep since well before he was born, and I must say that I feel like a new person. He's also gotten so interested in his hands that he amuses himself for up to 20 minutes after waking up just by playing with and even sucking on his hands. He's adjusting well to our new schedule of work. I went back on Sept. 15, and he is getting along with his daycare provider, Karen, well. At first he wasn't liking to take a bottle from her, but that seems to have sorted itself out. Karen watches three other babies (most closer to a year), and she said that yesterday Andrew was really smiling at one of the others. We're heading up to Northfield this weekend so Andrew can see his future Alma mater (just kidding).

New photos will be forthcoming next week, but in the meantime, you can see some Babler family photos that we had taken in late August and some photos from Andrew's perspective.

Baby Center.com update

How your baby's growing: Is your baby strong enough to hold up his head now to see what's going on? [HE SURE IS!] Better joint flexibility allows many three-month-olds to wave and kick more forcefully, too, and to open their fingers and bring their hands together.

Chances are your little charmer is still bestowing smiles on everyone he meets this month, but he's getting pickier about the company he keeps. In large groups or with people he doesn't know very well, he may need some

time to get comfortable.

The temporal lobe in your baby's brain — which handles hearing, language, and smell — is bustling with activity this month. Make the most of it by talking to your baby, playing music, and reading out loud.

### **Sept 27 Update: Mom's still in the hospital (2005-09-27 14:18)**

It seems like every time Mom goes in to the hospital that she stays quite a bit longer than we expect. This time is no exception. Mom checked herself into St. Mary's on Wednesday the 21 because the chemotherapy and radiation were having such nasty effects on her systems. She was feeling better at first, but then over the weekend she took a step or two back, and her digestive system still hasn't calmed down enough to allow her to go home.

Fortunately she has a lovely view of Lake Wingra and the sunset from her hospital room, and she has as many visitors as she wants.

Chemotherapy and radiation treatments have been postponed until she's back up and running, and unfortunately, since she has over a week left of treatments, she'll probably start to get sick again once those start.

Since she's been off chemotherapy, her hands and feet are hurting her less and her mouth sores are healing. So that's been nice. The down-side is that the radiation has caused some abdominal pain (zapping your gut doesn't occur without some side-effects) and her alimentary canal is still very much out of wack.

So that's the update for today. Mom is still in good spirits (if a little tired sometimes). She has a room full of flowers and sometimes family and friends, and all these conditions are caused by the treatment, which is hopefully leading us toward the removal of that pernicious tumor.

### **Visit to Northfield was fun! (2005-09-27 21:45)**



Sept. 27: Andrew is now 14 weeks old! I weighed him yesterday, and he came in at 14 pounds, 7 ounces (fully clothed).

And last week he measured 24 inches long. We went on a driving trip up to Northfield for the weekend. I had a meeting for my alumni committee on Friday and Saturday. Andrew and Bryan explored the Carleton campus and town and came to visit me for nursing breaks. On Sunday we drove up to St. Paul to visit Mareta and to see her beautiful campus. St. Kate's is really nice, and as I haven't been up there since we dropped her off last year, it was fun to see the campus now that it is "hers."

We missed our Happy Bambino group for the second time this week, which is sad. I had so much fun with our friends there. We have a dinner planned for this Saturday, however, so hopefully that will provide a nice opportunity to get together. Photos from the past few weeks are available in the gallery (and if you missed them over the last week, we also have some Babler family photos as well.) Hope all is well with you!

Althea

## 1.6 October

### Oct. 3 Update: Mom's back home (2005-10-04 08:33)

Oct 3: Sorry to be belated in posting this...I tried last week and had technical difficulties... Mom is feeling better and came home from the hospital on Friday afternoon. Healing is always somewhat slow, but she's on the mend. That Fluorouracil is just a pretty nasty drug. Mom has an appointment with Dr. Diggs (her oncologist) this afternoon, so she'll find out then when she'll resume her treatment (she has about a week and a half left of radiation with continuous infusion of Fluorouracil). That's the update for now!

### Oct. 10: Experiencing some chest pain (2005-10-09 23:45)

Oct. 10 afternoon:

The doctors did a series of tests and weren't able to determine the cause of Mom's chest pain. She's going to be taking 800 mg of Ibuprofen (which can cause nausea...great), and she went home this afternoon. I found a website that has some info on the connection between chemo and chest pain ([chemocare.com](http://chemocare.com)).

Oct. 10: Mom went to the hospital this morning because she's been experiencing chest pain over the last 12 hours or so. As of 9 am, the doctors have done an EKG and ruled out a heart attack, but they're doing tests to check for fluid around the heart sack and blood clots. I talked to Mom on the phone this morning, and she said she'd been uncomfortable if she moved in certain ways, and she spent the second half of the night sitting up. They gave her a couple baby aspirin, and she said that helped. "Just another bump in the road," she said. I'll give more updates as I hear them.

Oct 9: Four days left!

Mom started up on her chemo treatments again on Tuesday last week, and she only has (I think) four treatments left this week until she's done with this round. They decreased the chemo dosage, so hopefully that will help her avoid getting as sick as she wraps up. Then we wait four weeks or so before they scan to see how much pocco the tumor has shrunk.

That's the update for now!

**Visit with Mom, Dad, and Melanie (2005-10-10 00:03)**



Oct 9: We had a wonderful weekend visit with Bryan's parents and Melanie. Photos (lots of them!) are in the gallery. Melanie also took some great pictures of the pets. Andrew has been smiling more and more. Some of the first pictures I got of his smile were on Sept. 30 (see pics). He is getting more and more interactive, and he's making lots of goos and is looking all around. Each day is so much fun with this little guy!

**Chemo and Radiation are done! (2005-10-18 08:45)**

October 18: I'm happy to report that Mom's chemotherapy and radiation treatments ended last Wednesday (the 12th), and she's now done for at least the next three weeks. Her body will get a good hiatus to rest and recuperate, and hopefully she'll be feeling better and better. The chest pain problems she was having have begun to subside. It sounded pretty painful, but the doctors ran all sorts of scans and couldn't find anything wrong with her. So we're guessing that the pain could be related to the fact that her chemo port is in her upper chest and maybe having continuous infusion of nasty drugs for six weeks irritated blood vessels in her upper chest.

As of Monday, Mom said that she is still experiencing some nausea and malaise, and she is sticking pretty close to home.

The next step (after three more weeks of recovery) is to get a CAT Scan on November 8. Check out this site for a fun explanation of how CAT scans work. On the 8th, they'll be looking to see how much the tumor has changed. Our

fervent hope is that the treatments that were so hard on Mom's systems were also really hard on the tumor and it has shrunk to the point that it is removable with surgery. As a reminder, the primary reason that the tumor could not be removed in June was because it involves about three centimeters of the superior mesenteric vein. Here's a site that talks about the Whipple Procedure, the surgery Mom will have if the tumor has shrunk enough that it is not surrounding her superior mesenteric vein. Here's a 9-page PDF for those who really want to learn more about the surgery. The superior mesenteric vein drains blood from the small intestine, and because it is such a vital and delicate vein, it is very difficult to operate on. Hence, we really want the tumor to BACK AWAY from the vein. So that's the current update. Should be quiet for a while!  
Althea

### October activities (2005-10-18 18:43)



October 18:

Our sweet little guy is getting so big! He's probably about 15 lbs now...still coming in at about 24 inches long. We've had a fun-filled month so far, and we've got lots more activities in the future. We had a terrific visit with Granny Lu, Granddad, and Aunt Melanie a couple weeks ago (see pics in the gallery). Then this past weekend, Gathering Waters had our big awards celebration followed by the national land trust conference here in Madison. On Friday, we head to Washington D.C. for John Patrick's baptism. I'm so excited to be his godmother. Then the last weekend in October, Joey, Andrew and I are going to head to Maine so he can visit Bowdoin College. I've just uploaded some pictures from the last few weeks including some really cute ones of Andrew in his pumpkin hat. Happy fall!

## Happy Halloween! (2005-10-31 21:16)



Oct. 31: We've had a busy couple of weeks! Bryan, Andrew, and I took a great trip out to Washington DC the weekend of Oct. 21. Grace and Tim's baby John was baptized, and I get to be his godmother. Photos of the weekend are in the gallery. Then on October 27, Joey, Andrew, and I went out to Maine to look at colleges. Again, Andrew was a wonderful traveler, and Joe and I had a lot of fun together. Lots of photos of Bowdoin, Bates, and Colby are in the gallery.

Today, we had a full day. This morning, we visited Karen's house and got a nice photo of the whole daycare gang. Then at noon, Andrew had his four-month checkup. He weighed in at 14 lbs, 2 oz and measured 25.5 inches long. He's good and healthy, but the vaccinations he had made him pretty unhappy this evening. We made a quick stop at a friend's Halloween party. Photos of lots of babies in costume are in the gallery.

Bryan's parents come up for a visit next weekend. Our maple tree is in its full color, so we'll hope for nice weather for them. Happy Halloween!

## 1.7 November

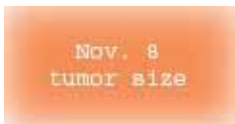
### Nov. 8: Cautiously optimistic (2005-11-08 16:34)

After several anxious weeks, Mom went in this morning for a cat-scan to see how effective the summer's chemo and radiation treatments were. Dr. Diggs, her oncologist, reviewed the cat scans, and he said that while the May cat

scans showed the size of the tumor to be 5.5 cm by 5.5 cm, the current cat scan showed that it has shrunk to 4.3 cm by 2.2 cm. That's about 30%! He's not sure if it has shrunk enough to be operated on, but we'll find that out when we meet with her surgeon on Thursday morning. For now, the possibility for surgery is still open!



The illustration below shows the difference:



### **Mom's surgeon was less positive about surgery...more tests are needed (2005-11-10 17:16)**

Nov. 10: Mom (and her entourage) met with Dean Care's new pancreatic surgeon, Dr. Matzke, today to review her recent CAT scan and to get his take on whether the chemo and radiation treatments that Mom went through last summer have shrunk the tumor enough that it is resectable (removable). If you recall, back in early June, the surgeons decided that the tumor wasn't operable because it was surrounding the Superior Mesenteric Vein (SMV).

When we met with Mom's oncologist, Dr. Diggs, on Tuesday, he looked at her most recent CT scans and thought that the tumor had shrunk by about 30%. He did, however, caution us that the surgeon would need to be the one to really provide a more accurate description of the tumor size and change in relation to other organs. We left that meeting somewhat hopeful, yet trepidatious about what today's meeting would hold.

Unfortunately, after reviewing the CAT scans, Mom's surgeon, Dr. Matzke, said he was a little discouraged at the tumor's response to the treatments. In terms of size, he said that the tumor was about the same as it was in earlier scans. He wants to do a CAT scan with a 2 mm slices of the pancreas area to get a better sense for the relationship of the tumor to the SMV. The CAT scan mom had done on Tuesday had 5 mm slices. To review how CAT scans work, see this website.

From the information he had from this rougher-scaled CAT scan, Dr. Matzke was concerned that it looks like the tumor's relation to the SVM has increased since earlier scans. It appears that the tumor is wrapped about fifty percent of the way around the SMV. This leads him to the following questions:

- Has the tumor invaded the SMV?
- Is the SMV open?
- Is there a clot in the SMV? (It looks like collateral veins to the SMV have grown in size...perhaps to compensate for the SMV not flowing unimpeded...)

- How far around the SMV has the tumor grown, and is there a fat plane between the SVM and the tumor for resection?

So here's the plan for the next couple weeks:

A) Mom has a CAT scan with a 2 mm slice of the pancreas scheduled for next Tuesday at St. Mary's Hospital. Dr. Matzke will review the scans with the radiologist to try to answer some of the questions he posed above. We meet with him again on Thursday, November 10.

B) If the results of the finer-scaled CAT scan do not rule out surgery, Mom will have an endoscopic ultrasound performed at the University Hospital On Monday or Tuesday, Nov. 21 or 22. The aim is to look for reasons why the Whipple procedure (the surgery Mom could have to remove the tumor) could not be performed.

If both these tests show Mom to be a good candidate for the Whipple procedure, she'll probably be looking at having the surgery in early December. We'll probably also go back to the UW Hospital surgeon we talked to in the spring to get her opinion on the results of these tests. I recently found a nice website that talks about the surgical considerations for pancreatic cancer. It has sections on the relation of blood vessels to the tumor and how surgeons decide if resection is possible.

But one step at a time. Today, we're all feeling rather deflated as I know we went into this meeting hoping Mom would be a clear candidate for surgery. This is teaching us patience and how to maintain a sense of inner calm amongst the storm.

The next update will probably be next Thursday.

Althea

PS I should really make a note here that through this all, Mom has been so amazing. She's got an amazingly positive attitude. She said yesterday that she thought that this was harder on all of us than it is on her. I'm learning a lot about appreciating each day, each interaction. We have such a great family.



**Enjoying these fall days (2005-11-13 20:15)**



Nov. 14:

Lots of fun photos of Andrew are up in the gallery this month! We had a great visit with Granny Lu and Granddad the weekend of Nov. 4. Photos of Andrew playing in the leaves, of our walk out to Token Creek Park, and of him trying out a push-up at the Pancake House are in the gallery.

The little guy is getting more engaged by the day, and he's even started to laugh now and then. He's ticklish, and he let out a good chortle the other day while I was dressing him and wiggling my fingers on his sides. Such a wonderful sound!

Andrew is big enough now to start having fun in a jump-up we have hanging in doorways. We also just got a saucer from Vicki that he's really enjoying. He can spin around, and just last night, he started reaching for things (like cords!) that aren't toys for babies. It has begun.

Pictures from the last two weeks are in the gallery, and they include a wonderful set of images of Andrew making a

wide assortment of faces to the camera.

The little guy has had a stuffy nose for a few weeks, and he's drooling like mad. Good thing we have plenty of burp bibs:) Hope you enjoy these late fall days. I can't wait for Andrew to see his first snow!

### **Mom's got an endoscopic ultrasound scheduled (2005-11-16 19:03)**

Nov. 17: We met with Mom's surgeon, Dr. Matzke, this morning to review the results of her most recent, finer sliced, ultrasound. At this point, Dr. Matzke doesn't think that the tumor can be removed. However, she's right on the borderline of resectability, so he wants her to get an endoscopic ultrasound to see if he can get a better view of the relationship of the Superior Mesenteric Vein (SMV) to the tumor. She has that procedure scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 22 at the University Hospital. Our next meeting with Dr. Matzke is on Monday, Nov. 28.

Dr. Matzke couldn't tell from the scan if the vein is invaded by the tumor. It appears to be wrapped more than 50 % around the vein, and it's unclear from the scan if there's a fat plane between the vein and the tumor that could be used for resection.

On a positive note, Dr. Matzke found that the vein is not clotted, one of the concerns he raised last week. There is quite a bit of corollary vein development (tiny veins that Mom's body has created to compensate for the SMV), which worries him.

Mom will go under general anesthesia for the endoscopic ultrasound, and they'll be looking to see if they can get a better picture of the tumor/SMV area. At this point, from the CAT scan images, Dr. Matzke said he wouldn't do the surgery. So in reviewing the results from the endoscopic ultrasound, he'll be looking to see if he gets a prettier picture.

Dr. Matzke trained at the Rochester Mayo clinic, and he recommended that we get a second opinion from Dr. Mike Farnell, who he said is probably the best pancreatic surgeon in the country. Dr. Farnell does around 15 Whipple procedures each month.

We're also planning on going back to Dr. Sharon Webber at the UW Hospital to get a third opinion. Those appointments will probably take place in early December.

That's the update for now. Surgery to remove the tumor isn't a clear option, but it hasn't yet been ruled out.

### **The land of many doctor appointments (2005-11-29 04:48)**

Nov. 29: Mom has had a record number of doctor appointments over the last few weeks. We have a horde of seven of us attending them (Mom, Dad, Mom's cousin Paula, Michael, Joey, me, and Andrew), and we are starting to get assigned seats as we cram in to the doctor's office:)

I don't think Mom's tumor read the part of the book where it shrinks and goes away. It's being far too obstreperous, and I wish there was a way to punish it. Our meeting with Mom's surgeon, Dr. Matzke, yesterday wasn't a positive one. When we met with him last week, after the fine-sliced CT scan, he said he didn't think that the tumor was resectable (removable), but he wanted to do an endoscopic ultrasound to see if he could get a better view or find anything that showed that surgery was a good option. We were frustrated to hear that the ultrasound showed that the tumor is pushing on a

significant portion of the Superior Mesenteric Vein (SMV) and has actually invaded a portion of the vein. In Dr. Matzke's opinion, the extent of the involvement of the tumor to the SMV leads him to believe that it is not operable.

We're still getting two more opinions. On Friday, we're going back to Dr. Sharon Webber at the UW Hospital, and on Monday, Dec. 5, Mom has an appointment with Dr. Mike Farnell at the Rochester Mayo Clinic. Dr. Matzke said that if anyone in the country could remove the tumor, it would be Dr. Farnell. The surgery Mom would like to have (that sounds so odd) is called the Whipple procedure. Here's a good website that describes it.

If doctors Webber and Farnell also find that Mom's tumor is inoperable, she'll be looking at chemotherapy treatments to control the tumor and to try to prevent it from spreading. I believe Mom is trying to make an appointment with an oncologist while we're up at Mayo to get another opinion on the next best tactics for chemotherapy.

So that's the update this week. Mom's in quite a state of limbo...not knowing if she'll be in surgery soon or now, but as she's been through this whole mind-numbing experience, her same, wonderful mommy-self. We had a lovely Thanksgiving and trip down to Chicago, and we appreciate every day.  
Althea

#### **Andrew's first Thanksgiving was a hit! (2005-11-29 05:32)**



Nov. 29: Our little guy is five months old! Hard to believe...he's getting so big. He is starting to sit up (with a good deal of support), and he's getting to be more accurate and determined when he's reaching for toys (or hands or glass

things). His giggle comes a bit more regularly. Especially when he's tickled or gets a zerburt to the belly.

Three new albums in the gallery this week. One of assorted photos (mostly of cute baby), one of our Thanksgiving celebration, and one containing some photos of our trip to Chicago.

We had a really nice Thanksgiving with my family. We "broke in" Terry's kitchen and had a feast with about 12 people. Mom made a 20 lb turkey plus a whole additional turkey breast. And lots of other dishes. It was delightful. Last night, Bryan and I had a wonderful dinner of leftovers. I especially liked the Swiss corn bake. mmm Andrew's not eating solids yet, so he was entertainment, and actually, he slept through dinner while we all ate.

That evening, we took Thanksgiving dinner down to Monroe to see Grandma and Grandpa. We hadn't visited them since last summer, and it was so nice to spend a bit of time together. I love my grandparents:)

On Sunday, we went down to Chicago for another day of stuffing ourselves full of amazing foods. We went to brunch at the Four Seasons, and then while Mom and Dad went to the planetarium, Michael, Lisa, Joey, Bryan, Andrew, and I shopped around on Michigan Ave. It's so fun to window shop and explore a big city at Christmas time. There were so many lights and decorations, and it was a lot of fun to see. We capped off the day with a huge dinner at Ron of Japan.

On Monday, Mom and I went down to Janesville to visit Mum and to share Thanksgiving leftovers with her. Andrew is a great traveler, but I think a week or so of a dull schedule will sit well with him.

Our next adventure will be picking out a Christmas tree!

Althea

## 1.8 December

### Waiting on Mayo test results (2005-12-17 18:07)

Dec. 17 I'm sorry I haven't updated this earlier if you've been anxious to hear the latest news about Mom. I keep thinking we'll know something more soon, but each appointment leads to more appointments. Mom and Dad went up to Rochester, MN to Mayo clinic on Dec. 8 for an appointment with Dr. Farnell.

The appointment was originally scheduled for Monday, Dec. 5, but her records (and therefore the appointment) got delayed. Dr. Farnell's assessment was a positive one. He thinks she's too young to have this disease, and he wasn't as worried about the relationship of the tumor to the SMV. Dr. Farnell thought the fine-grained CT scan was well done but wanted to re-run the endoscopic ultrasound at Mayo. So on Thursday, Dec. 15, Mom, Andrew, and I went up to Mayo for that test and a re-biopsy of the tumor. Mayo is an amazing facility. I didn't take any photos while I was there (hands were full of baby), but here's a neat website that shows some great images.

Mom's endoscopic ultrasound went fine, but she didn't get out of recovery until after all the people involved in the test had already left for the day. Sooo, we're waiting to hear back from them. Surgery is still an option at this point.

We should

hear on Monday or Tuesday...

Althea

## Enjoying the Christmas season (2005-12-17 18:22)

Dec. 18: It's been so fun to have a baby this December. It's really gotten me in the Christmas



spirit.

Andrew is doing all sorts of fun things these days...starting to sit up (and tip over), smiling, sometimes giggling, reaching for things he wants, eating paper, all sorts of good times.

On Dec. 17, we gave him his first solid food (his first solid non-food was a chunk of a map at Mayo clinic). He was really intrigued by his rice cereal, and although it was all over his hands and face and chin and bib by the time we were done, I think some went down his throat as well. He was reaching for the spoon and crossing his eyes as the spoon came close to his face. Such a cute kid!

We got a Christmas tree and took pictures of the search and the decorating. Andrew loves coming out to the living room in the morning when the tree is all lit up. It's so sweet to watch him reach for it and turn his head to look at it when we move. Photos of the tree and Andrew and a party with friends are in our gallery. We've had so much snow this December. it's been really lovely. Pictures of Andrew eating, being outside with Dad, and doing all sorts of other baby things are in the gallery.

We are doing a fondue Christmas get-together at our place with my family tonight. Then on Friday we head to Texas for a week.

We're so looking forward to it!

Merry Christmas!

### **Mom's a go for surgery!! (2005-12-19 01:32)**

Dec. 19: We just got some amazing news...Mom is scheduled for surgery with Dr. Farnell at Mayo the week of January 9. They're going to try to get that tumor out of there!

Mom talked to the doctor who reviewed her endoscopic ultrasound today, and he had two major points to convey: 1) the test didn't show anything that made them think that surgery was out of the question and 2) although they ran a set of biopsies on the tumor and on lymph nodes and they didn't find any cancer cells.

This means that she gets to have the Whipple Procedure (the surgery they do to remove the tumor) and there is a 4-5 % chance that what she has is not cancer at all. Here's Mayo's website discussing the alternative types of tumors it could be. She was diagnosed with mucinous adenocarcinoma. Apparently it is very hard to prove a negative biopsy, and what she has is acting like cancer, but it's kind of amazing news.

The doctor ended the conversation telling her to have an optimistic Christmas:)

As far as I can tell at this point, the surgery Mom will have in January can be broken down into several steps. At each point, Dr. Farnell has the option of stopping the procedure and sewing her back up if they find conditions that they don't like. The first thing they are going to do is a laparoscopy. She had one of these on June 9 to see if the tumor had spread, and before they go in to remove the tumor on the pancreas, they are going to do another laparoscopy to make sure it hasn't spread to other parts of the abdomen. If they see evidence that it has spread, they won't even start the Whipple Procedure. However, if the laparoscopy doesn't see any metastatic spread, they'll do the Whipple. The re-plumbing of Mom's digestive system. Here's a good diagram showing "before" and "after" from Mayo's website.

Here's some information on the Whipple Procedure

- From USC
- A really detailed 9-page PDF describing the procedure
- <http://www.treatments-for-pancreatic-cancer.com/html/surgical-options.php3>
- A 16-page scientific document from Gastroenterology

We still have quite a few bridges to cross before we can say we've had a successful surgery, but this is so much better than the news we were getting throughout November. What a Christmas gift!

Enjoy the holidays:)

Althea



**Baby's first Christmas! (2005-12-24 23:43)**



Dec. 25: We're having a terrific Christmas with Mom and Dad Dotzour and Ben and Melanie in Texas. The weather is beautiful (sunny and in the 60s), we're all happy and eating well, and we're taking photos aplenty. Check out the gallery for photos of Andrew's first Christmas (so far!). Looks like he was pretty good this year, because Santa brought him fun toys and clothes. Merry Christmas to you all!!

Love, Althea

PS See also some pics from earlier this month...

**Mom's surgery is scheduled! (2005-12-29 18:37)**

Dec. 30: Wonderful news! Mom's surgery is scheduled for Wednesday, January 11 at the Mayo clinic in Rochester. Dr. Farnell will be performing the surgery. Not only is it scheduled, but she also got approval that her health insurance will cover it. Thank heavens! Mom will have her entourage (I think there will be about nine of us) on the 11th at Mayo. The time for the Whipple Procedure has come!





## 2. 2006

### 2.1 January

#### **Preparing for surgery (2006-01-03 17:46)**

Jan 3: One week from today, on Tuesday, January 10, Mom will be at Rochester having her pre-operative appointment with Dr. Michael Farnell.

For so many months, the chance was dim of Mom being able to have surgery to remove her pancreatic tumor. But now, seemingly quite suddenly, the day of her surgery approaches. So I've been trying to learn more about the Whipple Procedure in order to know what to expect.

During the Whipple Procedure, also called a pancreaticoduodenectomy Mom will have many pieces of her lower digestive tract removed: the head of the pancreas, possibly the spleen, her gall bladder, bile ducts, part of her upper intestine including the duodenum, and a portion of the lower stomach. Here's a diagram of the pre- and post-operative anatomy. I also found some historical information on the Whipple Procedure on the Wikipedia.

Once she is in surgery, the first thing Dr. Farnell will do is to do a laparoscopy to see if the cancer has spread. If it has, she won't have the surgery. If Dr. Farnell doesn't see any signs of spreading, he will begin the Whipple procedure. As he moves forward with the Whipple procedure, there are several points at which he can stop if he determines that he won't be able to remove 100 % of the tumor. So Mom won't know until she wakes up whether the surgeons are able to do the complete Whipple. It still seems so weird to be hoping that they can do the most complete, aggressive version of this operation.

Mom is expecting to be at Mayo for about 14 days after surgery (at least, that's the average post-operative hospital stay). She'll probably have a good couple months of general recovery time. Here's a nice website that describes the surgery for patients.

#### **Next update will be from Mayo (2006-01-08 23:09)**

Jan. 9: Mom's surgery is scheduled for Wednesday, January 11. Tomorrow morning a bunch of us are heading up for her preoperative appointment. That's when she'll sign lots and lots of forms, and I'll get to meet her surgeon, Doctor Michael Farnell.

We don't yet know what time on Wednesday she'll be scheduled for surgery (I think we find that out on Tuesday night after 8 pm). I checked with St. Mary's hospital in Rochester, and they said that I should be able to get internet access in the building. So my plan is to update this website over the course of the day on the 11th as we have information. However, knowing how quirky technology can be and knowing how things always take longer than you expect at hospitals, don't assume that there's a problem if you don't see a post.

We're going to have quite a gang at the hospital on Wednesday. Mom, Dad, Michael, Maretta, Joey, Bryan,

Andrew, Mareta's boyfriend Kyle, Terry, Tom, and perhaps my mom's cousin Paula. I want to wish Dr. Farnell a good night's sleep, a sharp mind, steady hands, and lots of stamina.

Thanks so much for everyone who is thinking of her, and if you want to reach me or would like to request an email when there's an update, you can email me at [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com).

**Andrew is a cute baby (2006-01-09 06:25)**



Jan 9: Andrew celebrated his first new year's eve with the Babler clan at Terry's condo downtown. He got to meet his great-aunt Julie for the first time. But he fell asleep well before midnight.

See the Gallery for photos of Andrew in the new year. This weekend, he is doing a great job of keeping us all smiling while we're at Mayo.

### **Surgery is a go for tomorrow morning (2006-01-10 00:58)**

Jan. 9: We just got done meeting with Dr. Farnell. I'm doing this update from Mayo's swanky, stylish waiting room. Her surgery is tentatively scheduled for 6:45 am on Wednesday morning. She's supposed to report in at 5:30 am (which, for Mom, is really early). Good thing our hotel is across the street.

Dr. Farnell said he expected the surgery will last six to seven hours, but it depends a lot on the complexity. He stressed several times that it isn't yet clear that he'll be able to do the entire surgery. They'll start with a laproscopy, move on to a physical and then visual examination of the site of the tumor, and then if it still looks do-able, they'll begin the Whipple.

Dr. Farnell said the average hospital stay is 10 days. He quoted risk to life at about 1 % and risk of complication at about 40 %. However, Mom told him that she doesn't plan on doing complications, so that should make things much simpler. Risks during the surgery are related to blood loss. For 24 hours post-surgery, risks are bleeding and potential clotting of the Superior Mesenteric Vein. Then for about one week, there's a risk of the new seams between the pancreas and the intestine leaking. Fortunately, most of those complications they can address without needing to do further surgery.

If they do the full surgery, they said that most patients (90 %) do not need to be in the ICU. The average hospital stay is 10 days, and they said they will try to get her up and moving the day after surgery.

Dr. Farnell has emphasized the complexity and number of uncertainties of this surgery. He said he can't guarantee that he can do the surgery, but he said that he'd like to give it a shot. He also stressed that it isn't clear that this is cancer. That's what Mom is aiming for! We should know about 24 hours after the full surgery if it is.

So now we go and Mom gets her blood drawn and takes care of some paperwork, and the rest of our gang should arrive this evening. So far, thumbs up!

### **Mom is checked in (2006-01-11 07:00)**

Jan 11

7:00 am: I'm writing from the Mayo St. Mary's Hospital patient waiting room. We got here at 5:45 this morning, and by 6:45 they had Mom in her gown and checked in. Dad said he was really impressed at how the professionalism and quality of the service we've received here translates right down to the patient check-in procedures. They're really efficient and courteous, and I think they're taking good care of my mommy.

A few minutes ago, she walked down the hall with her fuzzy patient socks and nifty hospital gown. They said they will start the surgical event at 7:45. Our gang has dispersed for breakfast and coffee for now! For some fun, early morning photos of Mom pre-surgery, see the gallery!

### **Mom's in the OR, but surgery hasn't begun (2006-01-11 08:25)**

8:25 am: We just got news from Louise, our surgical communicator, that Mom entered the operating room at 7:40. They have her set up...the anesthesia has been applied...but they haven't yet started surgery. That means Mom is getting some good sleep. I'm sure she didn't sleep a lot last night! Louise said she would tell us as soon as they know the results of the laparoscopy, which she estimated at two hours from now (10:30 am).

**Laparoscopy has begun (2006-01-11 08:40)**

8:40 am: Louise just came to tell us that the laparoscopy has begun. Dr. Farnell's nurse came down a couple minutes ago to say hello, so say that they were completing her pre-surgery prep., and to let us know that after they started the laparoscopy, we would have news in one to two hours. And so we wait...

**Laparoscopy didn't find cancer spread (2006-01-11 09:00)**



9:00 am: Louise just came to tell us that they have completed the laparoscopy, and they did NOT see any spread of the cancer. Thank heavens! Step one complete. They are now going to make a small incision on her right side and feel the tumor area. If it feels the way it looked in the CT scan, they make a bigger incision and take a look. Louise said we'd be moved from the group waiting room to her room soon, and she thought we'd get our next update at 11 am. I am SO relieved!

### **We've been moved to Mom's room (2006-01-11 09:25)**

9:25: We've been moved from the general family waiting area to Mom's patient room. So we've re-settled in Patient Care Unit 2C at the Mayo Clinic Saint Marys Hospital. People are knitting, cross-stitching, reading, drooling, and typing to pass the time.

And the sun is shining again today.

### **They're working to remove the tumor (2006-01-11 11:20)**

11:20 am: We just got a call in our little personal waiting area from our surgery communicator. GREAT news right now. Mom is in surgery and doing well. They didn't find any spread of the disease, and they are in the process of removing the tumor. I'm a little trembly as I've been pretty nervous (and I had some coffee this morning, which doesn't help with calming my nerves). Mom's doing so well. I'm really hopeful. They've begun the heart of the surgery!

11:50: Despite the protests of some of our group, I continue to take photos. You can see us as we wait in the gallery.

### **The tumor is out! (2006-01-11 11:35)**

11:35 am: Dr. Farnell's nurse, Jacquie, just stopped in our waiting room and delivered wonderful news.

The tumor has been removed and is being reviewed by pathology. They're looking to determine whether there are any cancer cells at the edges (margins) of the tumor. If so, Dr. Farnell will try to remove more tissues near where the tumor was located in order to try not to leave any stray cancer cells behind.

Jacquie said she was doing pretty well, although she has had a two transfusion units. Two to four transfusions are average for this surgery. Jacquie didn't have details about whether the Superior Mesenteric Vein was involved with the tumor. At this point, it doesn't sound like they needed to reconstruct the vein, but then again, they haven't received the report back from pathology yet. So far, this is a wonderful day.

### **Surgery is nearing completion (2006-01-11 13:30)**

1:30 pm: We just got a phone call from Anne, our current Patient Communicator. She said that they were working on the last anastomosis (connection between organs). Anne didn't have any information about what the report from pathology was, but it sounds like they are nearing completion of the Whipple Procedure. And at this point, it's sounding like they didn't have to reconstruct the SMV.

Mom has been in surgery for about five hours, and she's doing well. Mom, we're so proud of you!

### **The Whipple Procedure is complete... 1 1/2 hours to go (2006-01-11 15:00)**

3:00 pm: Jacquie, Dr. Farnell's nurse just came in to tell us that the surgeons are done with the Whipple Procedure, and they are moving on to closing her up. So the really complicated part is done, and the next phase, that of closing her up, is expected to take about an hour and a half. If that is how long it takes, she should be out of surgery at about 4:30 pm. Then she'll be in the recovery area for about two hours. So we may see her here in her patient room around 7 pm.

Jacquie said that they are not expecting to have to admit Mom into Intensive Care, and they said that they didn't have to mess too much with the Superior Mesenteric Vein. Good news, as that was going to increase her chance of the SMV clotting, plus it would have increased surgery time significantly.

Jacquie also had some updates on the report from pathology. They said that when they looked at the outermost covering of the removed tumor (the margins) under a microscope, they did find some cancer cells.

That means that a) the tumor probably was cancerous despite our fervent hope that it wasn't cancer at all and b) there may be some microscopic cancer cells that they left behind. Jacquie said that this is usually the case with pancreatic tumor removal, and she said that Dr. Farnell would be able to tell us more.

So mostly really good news today. I will post again when we hear that the surgery is complete. Mom sounds like she's doing well so far.

I'm so glad that they have been able to get the tumor out!

### **Mom's out of recovery and rolling to her room (2006-01-11 16:35)**

4:35 pm: As we watch, mom is being wheeled down the hall and in to her room. She's sound asleep and looks OK. We all

gathered in the hallway to watch her get wheeled past. So surgery is complete, she's out of recovery, and she must be doing pretty well as they're already putting her in her patient room. Wow.

The surgery is over.

Jacquie said that Dr. Farnell would come to talk to us after his surgeries are over for the day. She estimated that at between seven and nine pm this evening. I'll post at that point, but for now we can say that she is safely out of surgery. Now she has a long recovery and healing process. Thanks so much to all who have been watching and praying for her today. I've posted a few more photos of us hanging out for those who like a little visual diversion...

Althea

### **Mom's resting and talking and doing well (2006-01-11 18:50)**

6:50 pm: Mom's been in her room for about two and a half hours now. She was thrilled to hear that they were able to remove the tumor, and she's been drifting between consciousness and sleep.

Drugs are going to be good friends for the next week or so, and she is going to have some major recovering to do... But it feels so good to hold her hand and to hear her talk and answer questions and then to watch her sleep. We're waiting to hear from Dr. Farnell sometime in the next couple hours. At that time, we should have more details about the surgery and her expected recovery process. Dad is going to stay on a cot in her room tonight, and we've worked out a schedule with family members to make sure that she will have someone with her for her whole recovery here in Rochester. Michael and Joey are napping, Bryan and Kyle are putting together puzzles, and we're all swapping in to sit with Mom. The big news though, is that Andrew fell asleep and is snoozing in his car seat right now. Hopefully he'll stay asleep for the night (but that might be pushing my luck)! Next update after we hear from Farnell.

### **Dr. Farnell said the surgery was good (2006-01-11 20:15)**

8:15 pm: Dr. Farnell just came in to talk to us. He's a wonderful man; perhaps my favorite person today. He said Mom's surgery went really well, and it was great to see that he was pleased with how it went. Mom was very coherent and asked him several questions. After he left, she said she felt like she could do the splits, but maybe not today:)

Dr. Farnell said that he was able to preserve the Superior Mesenteric Vein (SMV). He said that the tumor went right up to the vein but that they were able to peel it away. This is terrific news, because some of the CT scans Mom had looked like the tumor invaded the vein. At four centimeters in diameter, the tumor was larger than ones that Dr. Farnell normally removes. He said it was definitely cancer.

As I mentioned in an earlier post, they found microscopic cancer cells right up to the edge of the piece they took out. That means that there may be some microscopic cancer cells left along the SMV.

However, Dr. Farnell didn't seem too concerned about this, and he said that follow-up chemotherapy may help. He's going to set Mom up with an appointment with a Mayo oncologist in the next few days.

Dr. Farnell sounded happy with the surgery. He said he'll be back in at 8 am tomorrow to reiterate what he said tonight in case Mom doesn't remember it. For now, the kids and Terry and Tom and I are heading back to the hotel to order some pizza and to sleep. Dad will stay here at the hospital with Mom.

Thanks to everyone who has been thinking of Mom today. At noon today there were over 100 people checking this website. Most of the rest of the day there's been close to 50. It's really amazing to know that there are that many people directing their good wishes her way. Thanks so much, and good night!

Althea

### **It's a new day, and Mom is doing well (2006-01-12 10:10)**

Jan. 12 at 10:10 am: It's 18 hours after her surgery, and Mom continues to do well. She's been sleeping lots, which is what her body needs right now. Dad stayed with her through the night, and he said she did well. They mostly slept amidst the hourly check-ups by the nursing staff.

This morning at 9 am Dr. Farnell and company came in to see Mom. Dr. Farnell said the surgery went as well or better than he had hoped. He said they were able to completely remove the tumor and that Mom's condition is good. They removed two lymph nodes during the surgery, and both of them came back negative for cancer. Yay!!

They transfused three units of blood while she was in surgery, so today I'm thinking about finding a place to donate blood to help someone else.

I asked Dr. Farnell if he encountered difficulty with the collateral veins that we had heard about from Dr. Matzke. Dr. Farnell said that he didn't see any big collateral veins near the SMV, and apparently they weren't an issue during surgery. It's really amazing that all the concerns and issues that the surgeons were concerned about haven't proved to be problems.

The nurses came by a bit ago and said they were going to get Mom up for a walk. Yikes! I doubt that will be a good experience for Mom. All on the road to making her feel better, though.

And that's the news for now... Althea

### **24 hours past surgery and no complications (2006-01-12 17:53)**

5:35 pm: After two walks and lots of resting, we are all celebrating the 24 hours post-surgery mark. She surprised us all by taking Andrew and holding him this morning. Just a little while ago, she was up and sitting in a chair in her room. So we all think she is doing wonderfully. Pain management is going alright...Mom said she feels like it's the day after major surgery. She has three IVs and assorted other tubes and items connected to her (I count 11!), and I think she is more than ready for at least some of those to go away. She is a great patient, though. Hopefully all the walking she did today will help speed healing and make some of the tubes and tape and wires unnecessary.

Terry, Tom, and Joey are driving home this evening. That'll leave me and Dad and Michael and Maretta here (oh, and Andrew too) on Friday. I'm so glad to be able to continue to report that Mom is doing well. In fact, she is doing great!

### **Galloping to recovery (2006-01-13 15:30)**

Jan. 13, 3:00 pm: Mom came up with the title of this post for me. Michael, Maretta, Andrew, Mom, and I are all hanging out in Mom's room. Andrew is lying at the foot of Mom's bed and is currently plying with her hospital bracelets. He's coo-ing and goo-ing and his little fingers are wiggling around in the air.

Mom has taken three walks so far today. All increasing in distance. She's not using the walking support that she used yesterday, and she is smiling quite a bit. (But NOT laughing. It is not nice to make someone who has just had



abdominal surgery laugh!) This morning when Dr. Thompson came by, he said Mom didn't need to be on oxygen any more. He also OK'd moving her three IVs from her arms to her goshong. Having lots less tape and tubes on her arms helps! Maretta rubbed lotion on Mom's hands and arms to get any residual tape off.

An oncologist came in this morning and talked to Mom and Dad. They are going to set up an appointment when they come back to Mayo for her follow-up appointment.

Mom is still sleeping and resting lots. I spent a while today reading her many of the emails people have sent her (in care of me) over the last few days. I've had several people ask about what Mom's mailing address is. Click on "read more" to access it. Like she said, she is "galloping to recovery!" Thanks for your continued concern:)

Margot Babler  
St. Mary's Hospital  
Patient Care Unit - Francis 2C  
1216 Second Street SW  
Rochester, MN 55902

### **Mom gets to start a liquid diet today (2006-01-13 18:58)**

Jan. 14, 10:30 am: Mom is sitting up in her bed, wearing her new aqua sweater, and looking great. She's taken a nice long walk this morning, played with her little grandson as he played at the foot of her bed, and took a good nap.

Dr. Farnell, his resident Dr. Thompson, and medical student Eduardo Terra Lucas stopped by at 8 this morning (in their snazzy suits and ties as all Mayo doctors dress). Dr. Farnell sounded really pleased with Mom's recovery. They've removed one of her IV drips, and she's not taking much morphine these days. Dr. Farnell said Mom could start on a liquid diet to see how her new intestinal system is working. After not having anything to eat or drink since Tuesday noon (that's 4 days!) I think she's thinking that sipping something even if it's just Gatorade might be nice.

We're having a changing of the guard today. Our friend Jack is flying his plane up to Rochester today to visit Mom. Joe is driving up for the weekend. Maretta is heading home for a day, Dad is heading home until Tuesday or Wednesday, and Andrew and I are heading home for the week. At this point, we're guessing that Mom might get discharged on the 21st. Mom will have to heal without the ministrations of Dr. Andrew for the week. But she'll be back in his care when she returns to Madison. I'm kind of sad to be leaving. Things have gone so well during our time here.

Between all the great news we've received and spending time with my family, it's almost been fun! While I'm away, I'll get updates from those who are here, and I'll continue to post reports on Mom's recovery.

Mom sends her profound thanks to everyone for their prayers and good wishes.

**Mom continues to improve (2006-01-15 19:03)**



Jan 15, 10:30 am: I've been trying to think of some amazing new content to post, since Mom has so many web-watching well-wishers. But fortunately, news from Mayo is pretty quiet. Dad and I drove home yesterday. Joey drove up to Mayo (and we saw him on the interstate!). Maretta went to Madison with some friends yesterday, and she is returning to Mayo again today. Mom took a bunch of long walks yesterday (she's exploring the whole hospital floor). She's continuing to sip her Gatorade. Her number of tubes continues to decrease, and amidst lots of naps, she's begun knitting and sitting up more. This morning Mom told me that she's doing better and better and that she thanks everyone for their continued thoughts and support.

Uploaded a final installment of photos from Mayo including several of Mom I took on Saturday.

### **Knitting makes a girl feel good (2006-01-16 17:00)**

Jan. 16, 1 pm: I talked to Michael and Joey before they left for Madison today. They said that Mom just feels better every day. She spent much of the morning working on knitting a cable blanket for little Andrew. The sun shines across the room onto her bed, so it is pretty cozy. More walks are planned for the afternoon.

The Gatorade Mom sipped yesterday made her feel a little ill, but she's moving on to some broth today (her first real nutrition since Tuesday the 10th!). So things are pretty quiet at Mayo today. And I'm having a fun day at home with Andrew. We went out to have lunch with a group of our friends with babies. They are all getting so big!  
Althea

### **Mom Unplugged (2006-01-18 04:27)**

Jan. 18, 8 pm: All tubes, plugs, and other wires and equipment are removed! Mom is moving freely and continues to make forward progress. I spoke with Maretta, and she said that Mom had some baked potato for dinner tonight. That's the good news. The bad news is that now that she is eating she is feeling pretty nauseated and crummy in the tummy. Hopefully those feelings will subside as her digestive system re-establishes itself in its new route.

Mom's doctors continue to be pleased with her progress, and she's looking at potentially coming home this weekend.

Maretta had an adventure with an amphibian yesterday. As she was adjusting a nice potted plant, a tropical frog jumped out at her. She said it had big sticky toes and that it climbed the wall and that it changed color to match the surroundings. Apparently the nurses captured it and put it in a bucket with some green leaves. I wish I had been there to see it!

That's the news for now:) Althea

### **Mom is back home! (2006-01-21 21:37)**

Jan 21: It's 1 pm, and Mom just walked in the door of her home. Yay! Terry drove up to Mayo last night, and this morning Mom and Maretta and Dad and Terry came back home.

Duncan went bonkers when Mom came in, and the cats continue to circle her.

We had a beautiful snowfall yesterday, so once again the outside world is white and bright. Mom is feeling well...the drive home wasn't bad...and she's beginning to catch up on the newspapers she missed. We're all so glad to have our mommy back at home.

**We have teeth! (2006-01-31 21:49)**



Jan. 31: It's been an intense week with little Andrew. He's helping us grow as parents.

Last Tuesday, we had our first experience with Pink Eye. The little fellow had lots of goobies in his eyes, and the doctor took one look at him and prescribed antibiotic eye ointment. He wasn't too upset by the whole thing, but since it is contagious, Bryan and I both took a day off work to stay home with him. Then on Friday night, he started running a fever. Over the course of the weekend, it skyrocketed, and Andrew was really miserable. On Saturday, we were excited...stunned really...to feel a sliver of a tooth peeking out from Andrew's bottom gums. On Monday, I felt its partner peeking through. We can't see either yet, but they're coming in. A low fever is sometimes associated with teething, but since his fever was so high, it appears that he was hit with a double-whammy of teething and being sick in the same weekend. He's better today (Tuesday), but still needing a lot of extra loving. So Bryan and I each took a half day off to be with him.

Andrew is growing up! I'm feeling so proud of him. That and general exhaustion from helping him cope with this exciting new development. He's not so keen on the teething experience. Photos from the last couple weeks are in the gallery.

## Mom came to visit me (2006-01-31 22:01)

Jan. 31: To all those who have been checking my website for updates on Mom's continued recovery, I apologize for the long delay between posts. Andrew's recent bouts with pink eye, a high fever, and getting two new teeth sapped all my extra time and energy.



But the good news is that there really hasn't been much to report in the last week or so. Mom continues to improve. She went to Terry's condo last week, went out to Culvers with Dad on Saturday, and yesterday Dad brought her over to my place for the afternoon. She kept me company while we tended to a somewhat unhappy Andrew.

She's still very tender and taking it slow. Several naps help. But she's looking good, and I'm sort of awed at how well she's recovering. Mom has an appointment back up at Mayo in the next week when I believe she meets with an oncologist there to talk about additional chemo options. I'll post an update when we know more about what her next treatment will be.

Thanks again to so, so, so many people for thinking of Mom while she had her surgery. I still can't believe that it went so well.

## 2.2 February

### Our happy boy is back (2006-02-12 10:42)

Feb. 12: For the last week, Andrew has felt so much better, and it is just wonderful to have our smiley boy back.



He woke up this morning feeling good and was playing in his crib and shouting "baba ba ba Ba BA BA BA BA!"

On Monday last week, we had a few friends over, and it was cool to watch Andrew interact with other babies. They all sat on his sheepskin rug and played with toys. Andrew is an observing kid, and when someone took a toy from him, he didn't react much. He mostly watched ... startled and surprised. We put him in a johnny jump-up last night, and he was jumping and jumping. This is the first time he's gotten the hang of how that game is supposed to work.

He's eating a variety of solids now, but he still only really likes yogurt, bananas, and sweet potatoes. It's cute to watch how excited he gets when he is eating food he likes.

Happy Valentine's Day! Hope yours is lots of fun. New photos from the last week are in the gallery.



**Ahh...a vacation in Texas (2006-02-26 19:11)**



Feb. 26: We're just back from a lovely visit to Texas where we moved in with Bryan's parents for the week. Andrew's day care provider went on vacation, so we decided to modify our planned weekend trip to Texas to a full week. Ben and Melanie came down from Dallas for the weekend, and we really enjoyed our brief visit with them.

Photos from our trip are available in the gallery. Andrew came down with a head-cold on Monday, and he spent most of the week coughing and sneezing. But he was happy even so. Granny Lu earned her wings or super-hero status or some level of sainthood by getting up early every morning with Andrew so Bryan and I could sleep in. I think it worked out well for everyone.

Bryan and his dad got to golf one day, and we ended our visit by getting to see several of Bryan's parent's friends. I'm really glad that they had an opportunity to share their grandbaby with their friends!

I also posted a few photos of Andrew on Valentine's Day. He had a great time eating some of his Valentines:) And now it's almost March! The days are getting longer...

## **Mom's post-surgery chemo regime has begun (2006-02-27 09:24)**

Feb 27: It's almost six weeks since Mom's successful surgery, and she is well on the road to recovery. So far along the road, in fact, that she started her post-surgery chemo regime on Valentine's Day. She is scheduled to get an infusion of gemcitabine every two out of three Tuesdays for 15 weeks. I think she said that put her at finishing in June. The 28th will be her first week off. During her first week of treatment, Mom had some negative side effects, mostly relating to headaches and racing pulse. She went into the clinic for infusions of saline on Friday, and by Saturday she was feeling better.

On Friday, March 3, Mom is going to be heading back to Mayo for a follow-up appointment with Dr. Farnell and with an oncologist there. I'll let you know what they say!

We're on to the next phase of treatment...and Mom is doing a fabulous job.

Althea

## **2.3 March**

### **Chemo treatments are staying the course (2006-03-12 16:39)**

March 12: Mom had her second round of chemo on Tuesday, March 7.

She was scheduled to go to Mayo for a consultation with an oncologist there on March 3, but at the last minute, we found out that the insurance didn't go through. So she's currently going through an appeal process, and in the meantime, she's proceeding with the clinical trial protocol. At some point, she'll go back up to Mayo to have a follow-up appointment with Dr. Farnell and hopefully also get a consult with an oncologist there.

Mom's post-surgery chemo protocol calls for two weeks of chemo followed by one week off. So she had treatments on Feb. 14 and 21, had the 28th off, and had another treatment on March 7. She said that her main side effect is fatigue a couple days later. She's scheduled for treatment on March 14, 28, and April 4. We thought she was supposed to have 15 rounds of post-surgery chemo, but according to the arm of the clinical trial that she's assigned to, she's just supposed to have six treatments. Not sure if that's a good thing since she'll have less icky treatments or a bad thing because more treatments would be more effective.

Yesterday Mom and Andrew and I went shopping for the afternoon and then spent the evening together. It was a great day. Beautiful weather and fun in every respect. Plus we got a great coat for mom and some cute clothes for Andrew!



## Working on pushing up (2006-03-12 17:04)

March 12: Andrew is so much fun!! He's laughing and reaching and is engaging more and more with the people and objects around him. Photos in this week's gallery include playing with April and visiting with Alex and Clara...friends from my office.

We had an Oscar-watching party last weekend, which was great fun, and the past couple days have been warm and full of the promise of spring. We saw and heard a large flock of sandhill cranes fly over our house yesterday. Spring is on the way! Here's a website with some nice quotes about spring.

Andrew is getting more and more adventurous with food. He started eating Cheerios last weekend, and I think that was a major turning point in his experience with solid food. He loves focusing intently to pick up each Cheerio and then to carefully try to maneuver the part of his hand holding the tasty morsel into his mouth. His success rate is at about 1 in mouth out of 4 attempted.

Andrew's solid foods don't gag him when they're not totally smooth this week, and he's starting to enjoy mashed carrots, avocado, and little pieces of fruit and tofu. The little guy is sitting next to me as I type, and I imagine he's saying "Hi to all!"

Happy St. Patrick's Day! (2006-03-17 07:48)



March 17: Andrew is so cute this morning in his outfit of green. We took some photos of our little leprechaun, and before I dash off to work this morning, I thought I'd put them on the website so you can see him too.

This week's gallery update also includes photos of a gathering we had with some of Andrew's friends on Monday. It is so fun to watch him interact with other babies.

Have a lovely St. Patrick's Day!

Althea

Wee Bit O' Irish

You're the flash and sparkle in dark Irish eyes.

You're the whimsy and charm of leprechaun guise.

You're the treasured gold at the rainbow's end.

You're the beauty and mystery of emerald glens.

You're the top o' the mornin' - my cup of tea.  
You're springtime adornin'...blessings on thee.

### **Carpe Diem Party for Mom - Save the Date! (2006-03-17 09:08)**

You're invited!

Memorial Day weekend marks the one year anniversary from my Mom's cancer diagnosis. We've had a trend of good news the last few months, and it is high time that we had a celebration.

My plan is to bring together many of the people who have and continue to care for, think of, and pray for Mom over the last year. I've got to think that part of the reason she is doing so well is that she has such a wonderful community of people who love her and who are bolstering hope.

So let's get together to celebrate Margot!

Date: Saturday, May 27 (Memorial day weekend)

Time: 11 am - 4 pm

Place: Token Creek Park, Shelter #5 (just north of Madison on Hwy 51)

For directions, click on the link below.

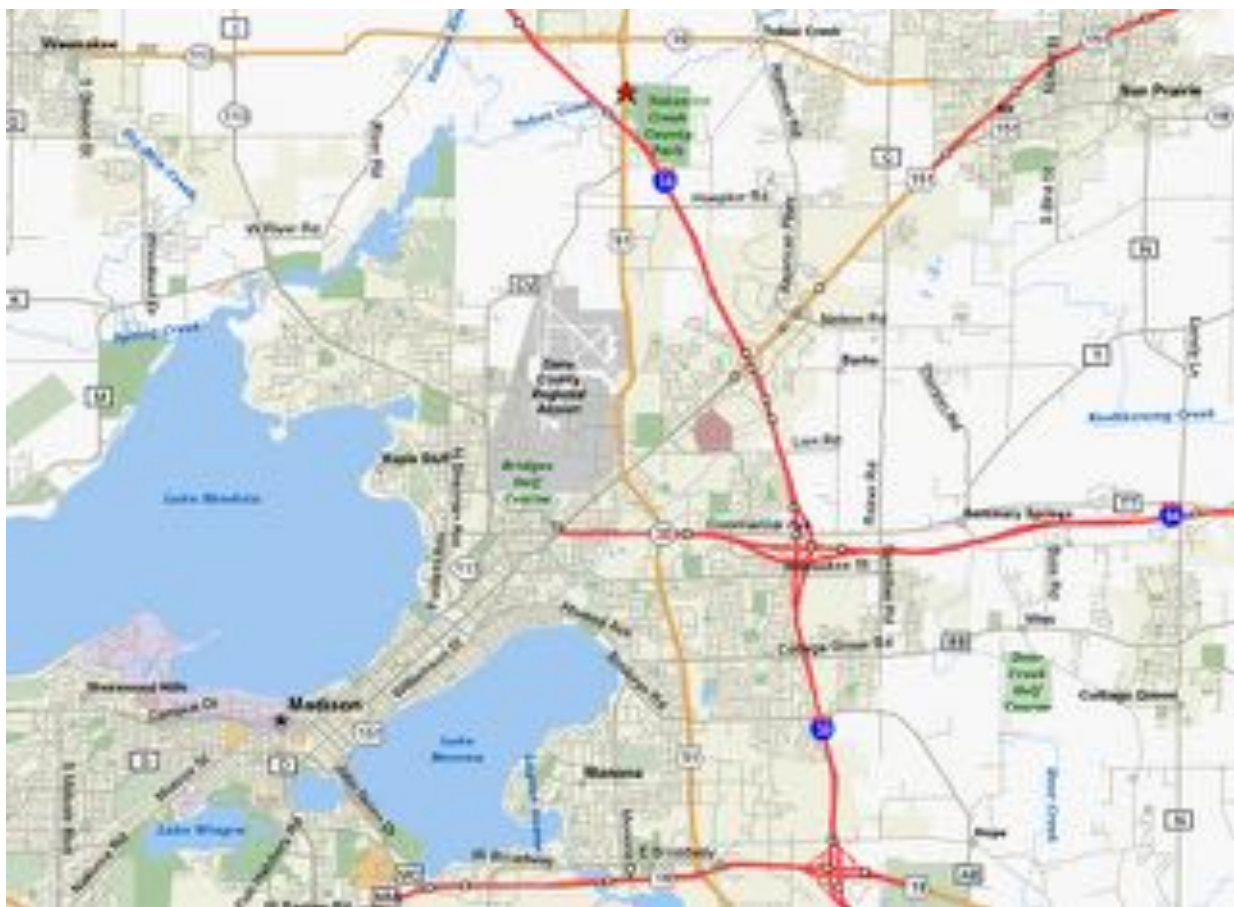
RSVP to [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com) or 608-223-9539..

Yay! I love parties!

Althea

The entrance to Token Creek Park is on Highway 51, one-half mile north of I-90/94. It is on your right, just after the Pine Cone filling station. Shelter #5 is toward the back of the park. Follow the road up the hill and keep your eye open for balloons!

A map is included below. If you have other questions, please give me a call.



**Week of Celebrations (2006-03-26 10:16)**



March 26: Late March is always a time for celebration in the Babler family. The 19th is Michael's birthday and the 25th is Joe's birthday. But this week we had loads to celebrate! Kyle brought Maretta home for spring break on the 18th, and to our surprise and delight, they announced that they're engaged! Yay! They're looking at a wedding in two years when she graduates from St. Kate's and he finishes his master's at the U-Minnesota. Joe has heard back affirmatively from several colleges, and on Sunday the 19th, Mom and Dad renewed their wedding vows. It was a wonderful day. Many pictures from the festivities are in the photo gallery.

Since Maretta was home for spring break, we got to see her several times over the last week, and we had some fun times together. Mom's birthday is on April 7, and then Maretta and Kyle are planning to come down for Easter weekend, so the festivities will continue into the next month.

Houston, we have movement! (2006-03-26 10:28)



March 26: Andrew is such a content baby...he hasn't really seen the necessity in struggling to move about. Looking at the toys he wants is almost as nice. But in the last week or so, Andrew started to scooch around on the floor on his belly. His transmission system has only figured out the reverse gear, but it's fun to watch him move up to a few feet backwards in his attempt to get a toy.

He lies on his tummy with his arms "airplaning" out to the side and then pushes up. Since his feet are usually hovering above the ground, pushing up causes him to slip backwards a couple inches. He is starting to figure out that he can move right or left by picking one of his hands up. It's a major focus of coordination to keep one hand holding himself up while the other moves to the side.

Pictures of Andrew from the last week are in the gallery.

Andrew's favorite game these days is "empty out the box of books." He also enjoys its close companion, "empty out the box of toys." These games are followed in interest by the surefire "drop the toy off the high chair tray." He loves to be read to, and he knows how to turn pages (and as we discovered, rip the pages of non-board books). Oh, and



on Thursday, he started clapping his hands for the first time! He likes the sound they make when they clap, and he watches them with rapt attention.

We're going to Wichita in two weeks to see his great-grandparents and Granny Lu and Grandad and hopefully Ben and Melanie too. We're already excited!

It's a time of major learning and growth in Andrew's world. He's a wonder to watch.

### **Two chemo treatments left in this round (2006-03-26 10:44)**



March 26: Mom only has two more chemo treatments of the gemcitabine in this clinical trial (March 28 and April 4). And so far, from the perspective of someone who a) isn't taking the treatments and b) doesn't live with the person taking the treatments, the chemo seems to be going really well. Mom gets pretty fatigued the week of the

treatments, and she has some good drugs that help with the nausea. I think she still doesn't feel right in part because of the surgery and in part because of the extensive radiation she had last summer.

All that said, this round of chemo hasn't hit her too hard. She hasn't lost her hair, and there haven't been that many days that she has really felt rotten. We've spent most Mondays together, usually shopping and/or spending time with "Dr. Andrew." So it's been about as good of a round of chemo as we could have hoped for.

In other good news, a law was passed on Friday that requires insurance agencies to pay for clinical trials for cancer patients. We're looking at a couple clinical trials that Mom might try this summer, so this could be really important. The American Cancer Society played a major role in promoting this legislation.

Governor Jim Doyle today signed Assembly Bill 617, the "Cancer Patient Protection Act," legislation that will help ensure cancer patients can receive the treatment with the highest likelihood for success by requiring insurance companies to cover treatments associated with clinical trials.

"It is unconscionable that a cancer patient should have to pass up therapies that could significantly prolong or even save their life because their insurance company won't pay," Governor Doyle said.

"The Cancer Patient Protection Act will help make sure every treatment option is available to cancer patients, and I am pleased to sign it into law."

Last year, more than 26,000 people in Wisconsin were diagnosed with cancer. For those suffering from cancer, clinical trials offer some of the most cutting-edge treatments available. But thousands of patients opt out of these treatments because their insurance requires them to pay out-of-pocket. Many times these treatments are routine, like chemotherapy, which the insurance company would pay for if it wasn't a clinical trial.

Assembly Bill 617 protects cancer patients from having to make treatment decisions with their pocketbook. It guarantees clinical trial participants the same insurance coverage for their routine care through a clinical trial that would get if they chose a standard treatment.

Additionally, because this bill will make clinical trials a mainstream treatment option, it will encourage more people to participate in cancer research, which can ultimately save many more lives.

Governor Doyle thanked Representatives Scott Gunderson and Sheldon Wasserman, as well as Senators Cathy Stepp and Jon Erpenbach for their work on the bill.



## 2.4 April

Nine months update (2006-04-03 22:41)



April 3: Andrew had his nine-month doctor's check up today. My mom watched him in the morning while I went in to work for a few hours (I normally have Mondays off). Then we went to Andrew's appointment. Our little guy is growing well. He's holding steady between the 25th and 50th percentile in weight and height. He weighs 19 lbs 8 oz and measured 28 inches long. I cannot believe how much he has grown! He's eating all kinds of mushy fruits and vegetables and is enjoying tiny chunks of cheese, tofu, and of course, cheerios.

This morning, I found that Andrew has cut his third tooth. It's the upper left one, and I think the upper right isn't far behind. He's been drooling lots, but aside from that, I haven't noticed much crankiness (which is great!). Pictures in this week's album include Andrew playing with his friend William, decorating for Easter, and little photo shoot of Andrew playing with eggs.

We fly out to Wichita on Thursday, and we're really looking forward to a visit with Granny Lu and Granddad, Aunt Melanie and Uncle Ben, and with all Andrew's great-grandparents and Wichita friends!

Joe's going to college in Maine! (2006-04-03 22:52)



April 3: On Saturday, Joey finally heard back from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. He was accepted! Bowdoin was his first choice, and after an agonizing couple of days, he confirmed his decision today by sending in an admittance fee and his acceptance card. So come the end of August, Andrew, Mom, and I will be driving Joe out to Maine. He is so excited (and I'd guess a little nervous)! On Sunday, Bryan and I hosted a party to celebrate his acceptance. We had clam chowder and "polar bear burgers" since the polar bear is Bowdoin's mascot. For more info on Bowdoin College, visit their website or see the photos from the trip Joe and I took to Maine in October.

### **Mom's last round of chemo is tomorrow (2006-04-03 23:10)**

April 3: Mom is nearing the finish line for her clinical trial. The last round of post-surgery chemotherapy is tomorrow. And she received some promising news last week – she may be a good candidate for a clinical trial vaccine that we have been researching. The pancreatic cancer vaccine clinical trial is based at Northwestern University in Chicago. If she decides to participate, Mom will go down for 12 injections over the course of about six months. [Click here](#) for more info on the clinical trial.

Here's an article on cancer vaccines from WebMD.

Johns Hopkins has a different kind of vaccine, but they have a nice website that describes in a flash movie how a pancreatic cancer vaccine works.

### **Mom's scan shows she is cancer-free (2006-04-11 20:18)**

April 11: Three months after Mom's major surgery up at Mayo, she is feeling good, had her last round of chemo, and got positive news from her recent cat-scan. We met with Dr. Diggs today, and he said that the radiologist who reviewed her cat scan said that they can't find any signs of cancer. Yay!

She ended up having her last round of chemo today. When she went in to have it last week, they said that her white blood cell counts were too low. So nearly 11 months after discovering that nasty tumor, Mom is completing her last round of chemo on the clinical trial in which she was participating.

She is now in the process of trying to get enrolled in a new clinical trial at Northwestern University that would use a vaccine to fight any remaining cancer cells in her body. More about that when we hear back from Northwestern.

So Mom will probably be tired and a little under the weather this week, but it's the last week, so that is great!

**Just back from a great trip to Wichita (2006-04-11 20:31)**



April 11: It was a tough night tonight, but the little guy finally fell asleep. (I hope.) He couldn't seem to get calmed down for bed this evening. One of those nights that I am so glad that Bryan and I can tag team and help get Andrew down together.

Andrew has graduated from saying, "Ba Ba BA!" to saying entire sentences in "Ba."

Sometimes he seems to be telling a story or explaining a complex thought. We just need a translator to stick in our ear so we can understand what he's telling us:)

We had a wonderful visit with Andrew's great-grandparents in Wichita last weekend. Granny Lu, Grandad, Aunt Melanie, and Uncle Ben all drove up from Texas too, so we had a great time together. I loaded way too many pictures in the gallery of our visit

with grandparents and an evening we spent with Bryan's pal from high school, Julie Anderson. Julie, Jerry, and their one-year-old, Grayson are such great friends. I'm glad we get to see them when we visit Wichita.

While we were in Wichita, Ben's brother, Tim, took family pictures for us. I'll put up a link when they are



posted, but in the meantime, you can see Tim's photography on his website.

I believe that spring has come to Wisconsin. The weather here is so balmy and sunny. I wish I could freeze these days and eek them out over several months (maybe February and March). Happy almost easter!

Althea

**Spring has arrived (2006-04-24 10:25)**



April 24: Spring has come to Wisconsin. The daffodils are blooming and are in their full glory. Tulips are beginning to appear and fill yards with color. The maples are flowering, and the streets are lined with their other-worldly spring-greenness.

We've enjoyed taking Andrew out into the yard a lot the last few weeks. He's having fun exploring all the new things that he can put in his mouth. Andrew has become pretty adept at rolling from front to back and from back to front. A couple days ago, he even got up on all fours while in his crib and started rocking back and forth. He's thinking about crawling! But he still only has the reverse gear in his transmission activated so far. Backwards and turning. And his favorite activity is still emptying out his box of books or his box of toys. Andrew is a champion clapper, and he has a great head -shaking trick, but he seems to have forgotten his third trick of making popping noises with his mouth. When I ask him to do it, he claps instead:)

We had a nice Easter and got to meet Kyle's family. Andrew also got his picture taken with the Easter Bunny. That weekend, we got Andrew a bike trailer so he can go on bike rides with us. Photos of our outings to Olbrich with Andrew and Easter are in the gallery.

A couple days ago, Bryan biked Andrew over to a park to enjoy an afternoon outdoors together. Photos of Andrew with our various furred family members and of Andrew's trip to the park with Dad are also in the gallery. Happy spring to everyone!

## 2.5 May

**April is getting much worse (2006-05-08 10:28)**



May 8: Our dog, April, has had fibrosarcoma, a bone cancer in her jaw for the last 10 months. See my post from late July when I described her diagnosis. We had the lump on her upper jaw removed in July, and it didn't start to come back until January. It's been growing steadily for the last five months, and now it's really starting to bother her. Chemotherapy and radiation aren't effective treatments of fibrosarcoma. If her cancer had started on a limb, we would have had the limb amputated, but the only real treatment was to have her jaw amputated. And even then, the median life expectancy was only about 16 months after the surgery. So last summer we elected not to do the invasive (and gross) jaw removal surgery.

We've had our fingers crossed that the tumor would grow back slowly and would be something that didn't bother her too much. April has been on prednisone and antibiotics for the last month to help with the side effects of the tumor. But this week, it has become clear to us that this isn't a sustainable situation.

April is in pain, and she's been bleeding a lot recently. We still don't know when, but we have started talking to our vet about when to put her down.

This really breaks my heart, because she is such a good, loving, and joyful dog. I went through the hundreds of photos I have of her from over the last five years and compiled a retrospective album of April. I love how April's joyful spirit shines through these photos. I also recently took some photos of April playing with our neighborhood dogs and some of her sitting on our lawn last night. She was very happy and rolling in the grass that night. See those photos in April's April album.

From being a therapy dog at the Hospital in Michigan, to letting Andrew paw all over her to running her "crazies" around the yard, April has been a wonderful dog and family member. I'm hoping we don't have to take any actions soon, but it is inevitable. I'll let you know when there is news. In the meantime, feel free to come by (if you're in the area) to give April a hug.

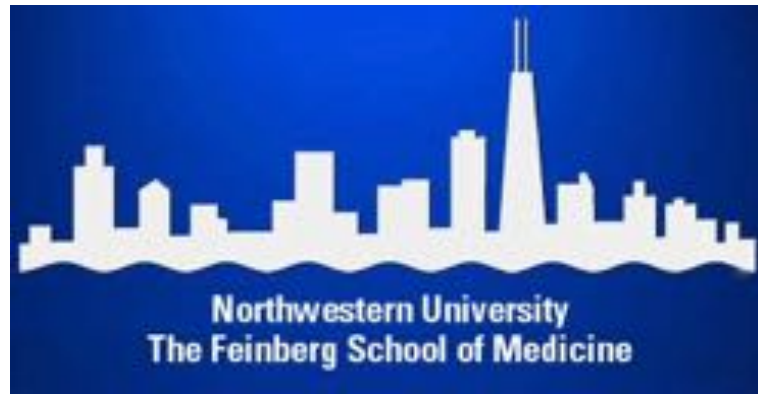
## Vacation in Door County (2006-05-08 10:40)



May 8: This past weekend we took our first family trip to Door County. Gathering Waters organized a land trust staff retreat in this lovely location, so we used it as a starting place for a short family vacation. Andrew and I drove up on Thursday, and Bryan joined us after work. The boys did some hiking and biking and playing on swings on Friday, we all went on a hike of The Clearing with our group, and then the three of us took off on Saturday afternoon to explore the peninsula. We drove around and saw orchards and beautiful views of the water while Andrew napped in his carseat. Whenever he woke up, we walked around or biked in the beautiful state parks that dot the area. Our favorite part was a bike ride through Peninsula State Park. I can't wait to go back sometime. It was such fun! Bryan pulled Andrew in the trailer, and we biked through maple-beech forests, white cedar forests and marshes, and saw stunning beaches and views of Green Bay. Photos from our trip are in our gallery. Pictures of Andrew creeping about (he's on the verge of crawling) are also in the gallery.



## Mom has started her anti-cancer vaccine (2006-05-10 20:28)



May 5: Mom and Dad drove down to Chicago last night for Mom's first round of her anti-cancer vaccine. She had a new cat-scan taken last Friday, and when Dr. Oyama looked at it today, he said she remains cancer free. Yay! I can get used to this news:)

Here's a link to a description of Mom's new clinical trail.

Mom received eight intradermal injections today. The hope is that the vaccine will cause Mom's body to identify and attack any pancreatic cancer cells that remain or try to grow back. The vaccine is composed of dead pancreatic cancer cell spliced with a mouse gene that the human body attacks. The logic behind the vaccine is that when her immune system attacks this mutated pancreatic cancer cell that the immune system may then extrapolate to think that all pancreatic cancer cells are bad and thereafter kill them off too.

## Relay for Life (2006-05-10 20:39)



Hello everyone! Happy Spring! Joe, the wee-est of the Bablers, here again.

A little less than a year ago, I asked for your support in my school's local Relay for Life fundraiser and you were all extremely generous in your financial support of this great cause. Last year, the De Forest community raised over \$20,000 for Relay for Life and they are trying for a similar goal again. A year ago, the event was held just two months after my mother's diagnosis. Now, a year later, we all have something to celebrate! Mom will be walking in the survivor's walk!

Last year I was involved in Relay for Life through my NHS, but this year some friends and I decided to get a team of our own together. The event starts June 9 when we all gather around the high school's track. People set up tents, sell food, walk laps, and generally have a good time until the ceremony begins. The ceremony is aimed to bring hope to those with cancer, and celebrate those who have defeated cancer. They also sell paper bags with sand and a candle in them, which you can donate in memory or honor of a person, for \$5 and line them around in the inside of the track. They then turn the stadium lights out and light all the bags for an amazing effect.

Anything you are willing to send is more than enough. In the past, donations of \$10 to \$50 were normal. If you want, you can send cash and I can buy paper bags and write any names you would like on them. Thank you in advance for your support!

Checks can be made payable to: Relay for Life

Send your donations to:  
Joseph Babler  
4575 Dennis Drive  
Madison, WI 53704

### **On the move... (2006-05-13 20:29)**



May 13: You know, it's one thing to know that your baby can start to move, but it's quite another thing to see your infant son's head appear around the corner of the door. I'm so used to having Andrew staying pretty close to where I put him down, but these past few days, Andrew has started scootching from room to room. His favorite spots destinations are April's bowls and electrical cords. Oh, and those springy door stops.

Photos in this week's gallery include some family photos, pictures from our visit with Mum, and several photos of

Andrew messily eating.

### Farewell April (2006-05-22 17:12)



April Dotzour

Madison, WI

- April, a 5 ½ year-old golden retriever, died on May 22, 2006.

Her sunny disposition didn't keep her safe from cancer, and it was fibrosarcoma of the upper jaw that led to her death. April was born on October, 18 2000 at a kennel in Michigan. She was adopted into the hearts and home of Althea and Bryan Dotzour on June 18, 2002.

April participated in a wide variety of activities including obedience and agility classes. While she never really got the hang of running an agility course (she just liked to tear around the equipment), she did receive the AKC Canine Good Citizen award for her good behavior. In 2003, April passed a series of tests and became a registered therapy dog through Therapaws of Michigan and Therapy Dogs, Inc. April and Althea visited the University of Michigan's pediatric physical therapy and cardiology units weekly where April spread happy dog vibes to sick and sad patients and their families. It was amazing the way people's faces lit up when April came into the room. Her favorite activity was catching balls for children who were working to develop arm mobility and strength. In doing physical therapy, April made a positive impact in many peoples' lives.

April's favorite activities included eating, chasing balls at the dog park with her dad, running "crazies" around in the yard, and exuberantly greeting friends. She spent many happy hours cuddling or being pet by those who loved her. April's heart was made ecstatic by many of her human and canine friends who will sorely miss her alert, welcoming face.

A retrospective of photos of April is available online.

Survivors include her mom and dad, Althea and Bryan; her boy, Andrew; and her fellow feline fur-faces, Bowser and Spooky. We are all so sad to see her go. A dogwood will be planted at the Dotzour home in honor and celebration of April's beautiful spirit. In lieu of flowers, give your favorite pet or person a big hug.

"Happiness makes up in height for what it lacks in length." Robert Frost

### **Hope you can make it to Mom's party on Saturday! (2006-05-25 22:19)**

May 25: Mom's carpe diem party is nearly here! I hope you can make it.

Here's a reminder of the details...

Date: Saturday, May 27

Time: 11 am - 4 pm

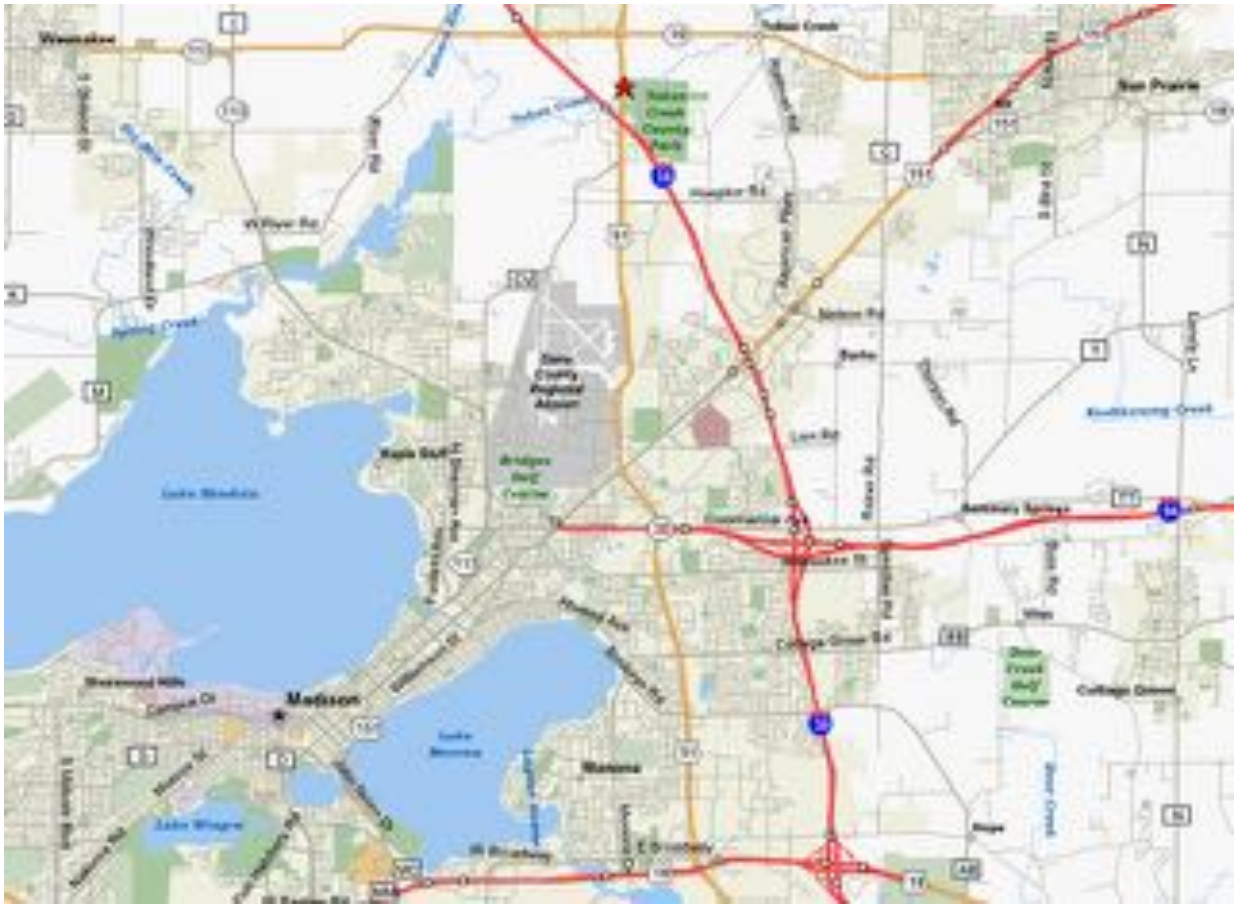
Place: Token Creek Park, just north of Madison on Highway 51 (details below)

We're looking forward to celebrating my mom's good health and thanking you for all of your support over the last year. There's no need to bring any food to the party; it's our thank you to you!

The entrance to Token Creek Park is on Highway 51, one-half mile north of I-90/94. When going north, it is on your right, just after the Pine Cone filling station. If you reach Highway 19, you will have gone too far north. Shelter #5 is toward the back of the park. Follow the road up the hill and keep your eye open for signs and balloons!

If you have any questions on the day of the party, you can reach me on my work cell phone: 333-1475 or on Mom's cell phone 239-5453.

A map is included below. If you have other questions, please give me a call.





So many milestones! (2006-05-25 23:22)



May 25: Andrew is fast transitioning from a 10 month old to a one-year old. It feels like in the last month, Andrew has been on a mad rush to grow up fast! I can barely keep track of all his activities. Here's a few highlights...

- While he's still not really crawling, he's pulling himself around a lot, and when he is on carpeting he sometimes crawls. At day care at Karen's, he can crawl up on a low trampoline. Amazing!
- Andrew said his first "words" last weekend. A DUCK (pronounced "uk") say QUACK QUACK (wak wak). Andrew is also saying "mama" and "dada" a lot, but not consistantly or exclusively for his mom and dad.
- Andrew is eating almost all foods now. And the food is going everywhere. His favorite food is still cheese. mmmm cheeese. He has a total of five teeth at some level of appearance. The bottom-left tooth came through last weekend (making it three on the bottom, one on the top), and the top-front-right tooth came through yesterday. My baby is growing up!

Recent photos in the gallery include pictures I took of Andrew to send to Bryan on his birthday. I also have a fun gallery of pictures of our terrific visit with Granny Lu and Grandad last weekend. Finally, we have some good pictures of recent visits with Mum and my Grandparents.

## 2.6 June

New lovely photos in the gallery! (2006-06-09 22:10)



June 9: When we traveled to Wichita in early April, we had some family photos taken. Ben's brother, Tim, is a professional photographer. Not only was he kind to do a really fun photo shoot with the Dotzour gang, he also gave us electronic copies of the photos. I've narrowed them down as much as I could and posted them in the gallery. To see more of Tim's work, visit his photography website. Many thanks to Ben and Melanie and to Tim for giving us this great opportunity.

**Andrew's baby friends turn One! (2006-06-10 16:27)**



June 10: We just got back from a really fun birthday party! Last summer, I was lucky enough to meet some wonderful new moms through Happy Bambino's infant play group. Happy Bambino is a terrific store. I love their staff and their products, but I am so thankful for the resource they gave me as a new mom...a forum to meet some wonderful friends.

A group of us started getting together outside of the weekly play group, and over the last year, we have had a lot of fun. Most of our babies are born between early May and late June, so today we had a combined birthday party to celebrate.

What fun it was to see all our little ones playing near each other, walking, signing, talking, and trying some of that tasty cupcake. Photos of the festivities are in the gallery. For the other mamas out there, I also posted the pics on Walgreens.com so you can download high resolution versions or get prints if you would like.

Happy Birthday babies!



**Update on Andrew at 11 months (2006-06-10 17:22)**



June 9: Little Andrew sure has grown some curly hair!  
Thought I'd give an update on what our little guy is up to this week.

- While he still prefers the military crawl as his form of transportation, he's getting his knees under himself a lot more and using them (when he's on carpeting) to crawl
- We believe that Andrew just added the word "cat" into his vocabulary. It sounds kind of like the sound he makes for "duck," but starting with a hard "ck" sound. Like "CKack." Brilliant.
- We just felt tooth number six this morning. Bottom right. Now he has two on the top, four on the bottom.
- Andrew has learned how to stick out his tongue on command. When I ask where his tongue is, he sticks it out and smiles.
- Last weekend, we went to the farmer's market, and he got to see some real-live cows. I hope to take him to the zoo soon. I think he'll be much more impressed than he was last year.

Photos are in the gallery of us hanging out over the last couple weeks. Special events included Uncle Joe's high school graduation and Heather and Michael's baby shower. Pictures from the last week are in the gallery.

**Andrew turned one today! (2006-06-22 22:42)**



June 22: I can't believe that my little guy is one year old! I shake my head in wonder that he's grown so much from the little baby who came into our lives 12 months ago. I've had fun the last week or so pulling together pictures of Andrew's first year into a photo album. What a journey it has been! Fun photos of Andrew's first days on Earth are in our gallery back in the summer 2005 album.

We had a fun day together today. I took off work, and we played all day. New Andrewisms:

- He's playing peekaboo by putting a blanket over his head. In the past, he's pulled a blanket off when I put it on him, but now he's doing it himself.
- He climbed up our porch stairs today for the first time. Didn't even give it much thought. Just up, up, up!
- He's been mimicking the word "yellow." I don't think he knows what it means, but when we say yellow, he repeats it recognizably.
- This boy loves cake! But then again, I'm not surprised.

Bryan and I biked down the street with Andrew tonight and got some gelato to celebrate his birthday. He's a big fan

of ice cream already:) Granny Lu, Grandad, Melanie, and Ben come to town tomorrow afternoon, and we're all so excited to see them. The party will continue!

Photos of the last couple weeks including some great shots of Andrew enjoying cake are in the gallery.

### **Birthday party and visit a blast! (2006-06-25 11:43)**



June 25: I am sitting here on this beautiful, cool June afternoon with my mind full of images of the fun times we had this last weekend. Mom and Dad Dotzour and Melanie and Ben just left to fly home to Texas. I only wish we'd had more time together!

On Saturday, some of Andrew's biggest fans gathered at a park in our neighborhood for his first birthday party. After a little bit, Andrew really seemed to get the hang of being the guest of honor. He especially liked it when everyone clapped together.

After the party, we all rested and then went to Olbrich park to enjoy some time on Lake Monona. Pictures of Andrew's birthday party and our visit are in the gallery.

## 2.7 July

Having fun with our friends (2006-07-03 23:32)



July 3: The last few days have been so much fun! Our good friends Grace and Tim, and thier son (my godson!) John have been visiting from Washington DC. Andrew and John are having a splendid time taking on the world together. At least John is taking it on. Andrew's mostly watching. John's really enjoying getting to know about cats thanks to Bowser and Spooky. Today we braved the high humidity and heat and took a field trip to Olbrich gardens. Many photos of their trip are in the gallery.



### Andrew's gaining new skills (2006-07-05 21:42)



July 5: Now that he's a year old, Andrew has taken on a few new activities. On Monday, June 26, Andrew had his 12-month doctor's visit. He tipped the scales at 21 lbs, 3 oz and measured 30 inches. That's 14 lbs and 11 inches bigger than he was when he joined the breathing world a year ago!

Among other questions, Dr. Harnish asked if Andrew was putting objects in boxes. Our answer was no...he's great at taking things out of boxes, but nothing goes back in. On Friday, July 2, Bryan and Andrew spent some time playing with nesting boxes, and Andrew learned both how to put things in a box *and* how to stack boxes on top of each other. When he stacks them, he smiles and waves his hands about...waiting for applause.

Tonight he started saying "ba" in reference to a ball. A new word!

Photos are the gallery from Maretta's 21st birthday, and a trip to the park with our friends Jessica and Eli. Andrew experienced his first playground slide. I think he'll be coming back for more.

### Mom's recent test shows no cancer (2006-07-16 12:11)

July 16: On Friday, July 14, Mom had a cool-sounding procedure done to break up some kidney stones. While doctors were doing that procedure, they also scoped her bladder to look for cancer. And they didn't find anything! Mom also met with a new oncologist at her clinic here in Madison last week, and he was really happy with her progress. He said that the main symptom they look for to indicate a re-occurrence of the cancer is weight loss. Mom's been

holding steady for quite some time, now, so that's good news too. And her new doctor sounds happy to coordinate with her doctor down at Northwestern who is doing the vaccine clinical trial. I think Mom's about half-way through the trial. She continues to go down to Chicago every couple weeks for her vaccines. There hasn't been much to report on Mom's health recently, and I think of that as very good news.

### Andrew is cruising (2006-07-17 15:15)



July 17: Andrew is ever-adorable, and he's such a fun baby today! On Friday, Andrew and Bryan took a trip to Madison's new public pool for some splashing fun. We went to the pool once before with our baby friends, and Andrew was pretty uncertain about the whole idea. Bryan said that he clung very tightly to him, and it wasn't until he sat in the shallows for a while before he started to have some fun.

New things that he's up to these days:

- A new tooth, his seventh, has popped through on the upper left...associated with lots of drooling
- Andrew has started cruising on furniture, and he'll sometimes take faltering steps when holding on to hands. What I find a bit more amazing, though, is how he'll sometimes let go of a chair or table and balances standing for 5-10 seconds
- Andrew's curly hair continues to curl and curl. I think it is SO CUTE!
- We've been doing some baby signs with Andrew, and he's starting to pick up on a couple. In the last few days, I think he's been doing the signs for diaper and for eat. Still only saying words like "duck" and "quack quack" and

"mama" and "dada" and "bye bye." Andrew's sign for "all done" continues to be chucking all food and cups off his tray.

Photos from the last couple weeks are in the gallery.

### **We had a refreshing trip to Ann Arbor (2006-07-24 21:01)**



July 24: We just got back this afternoon from a great, four-day trip to Ann Arbor.

It's been over a year since we last saw many of our dear friends from our days in Michigan, and it was so very nice to reconnect over a long weekend. In the four days we were in town, we saw eight sets of friends, and we're feeling like our tanks have been refilled.

Andrew also used this weekend to make some new milestones. Here's a few...

- He learned how to blow kisses. He especially likes to blow kisses bye bye to trucks "UKS!" when they go by.
- He can slide down a little slide unaided (sometimes) and can climb back up the ramp again
- He got his first bloody lip on the playground equipment, but he recovered quickly. You can see a bump on his lip in the photos from our weekend:({
- He said "Cup," but even more fun, he's been working on Cock-a-doodle-doo "cA cA...oooo"



- He seems to have figured out that he needs to back down steps, and at Heather and Michael's deck, climbed down the two low steps rather handily and without help.

I put some of the photos from our trip up in the gallery.

We just love Ann Arbor. It was especially fun to stay with Heather and Michael just a month before their little baby is due and to see my friend Sheila, who is due in September. More baby friends!

Ahh...it was a great vacation. And now we're back to work!

### **Realities (2006-07-30 10:23)**

July 30: It was occurring to me this morning that most of my posts are about how fun and wonderful Andrew is. I put pictures of our trips and visits with friends, I happily announce Andrew's developmental milestones, and for the last six months, I've had only positive things to say about Mom's health. So as I was looking at the loads of laundry and the dirty kitchen floor and thinking about the weeds in my garden, I thought that maybe it was time to post a more mundane update.

- I have yet to write a set of thank-you cards and reply to emails from dear friends. The guilt should be staggering..
- I spent the last week reading two novels from Elizabeth Peters (and not writing to friends). Sometimes I find myself trying to read while Andrew is awake, and that is just a bad idea.
- Storms have blasted through the area recently, and while all our trees and house are alright, our 6 foot tomato plant was not. It toppled into the rest of the garden, and now the beans and peas and basil and cilantro are trying to grow through it. We learned that we need twice as much ground to grow the number of things we planted. Ahh..maybe next year.
- Our white car has pretty much stopped providing air conditioning.
- I miss April a lot
- Even without April's fur and trackings around the house, the floor still gets remarkably dirty. I wish someone would clean it. hmmm. I think that's my job.
- I wish I could train the cats to clean their own litter boxes.
- Instead of accomplishing my household to-do list, my main goal today is to take a shower and to get out of the house.

So while life is smooth and nothing is wrong, I didn't want to give the impression that all we do is go on vacations and marvel at Andrew. Nooo I also read novels and watch Deadwood series II.

Althea

### **Andrew's perspective v.2 (2006-07-30 10:35)**

July 30: As Andrew threw himself around the bed this morning...crawling/crashing from one side of the bed to the other...Bryan and I reminisced about how much he has changed from the little blob of a baby that rested between us last year. For one thing, Andrew's perspective has changed so much. Last year, I posted an album of photos that contained Andrew's favorite things to look at.

So this morning, I thought I'd go around the house and quickly photograph some of his current favorite views. Photos are in the gallery.

## **2.8 August**

### **Mom's catscan is clear (2006-08-02 11:23)**

Aug. 2: Mom is down in Chicago getting another round of her anti-pancreatic cancer vaccine. She just gave me a call to let me know that her catscan shows that she is free of cancer. Yay! She says she wasn't worried and didn't think too much about the results ahead of time, but it's always a relief to know that her body is keeping cancer at bay.

Mom's vaccines got done early today. Now she and Maretta are on North Michigan Blvd. in Chicago with a whole afternoon ahead of them. Whatever will they do...

Wonderful time with Mom and Dad (2006-08-07 00:00)



Aug. 7: Bryan's parents just spent five days visiting with us, and we had a blast! I got to relax and read some books, Bryan and his parents played a fun round of golf, and of course, Granny Lu and Grandad bonded with Andrew. Grandad played "pony" and "tex" with Andrew, and they had a great time pretending together. "Comon Pony! Let's Ride!

Yeehaww!" Photos of their visit especially of Andrew playing in the park are in our gallery.

**I got to go Up North! (2006-08-12 00:00)**



Aug. 12: I just spent a really fun few days up north near Three Lakes, Wisconsin with my friends the Riccios. Back in high school, I traveled up north with Debbie, Liza, and Julia for happy summer times. Our group has grown, and I haven't been up to Whispering Pines in about eight years. I drove up north solo (sans husband or baby!) on Wednesday and had to leave on Friday, but during our trip together, we read, played Mille Borne, canasta, and euchre, took walks, and played in the lake. I missed my sweet boys, but it was so nice to get away for a bit. Bryan was just wonderful to take on single-parent-hood for a few days while I played in the woods. Photos of my time are in the gallery.

**Float'n down the river (2006-08-14 00:00)**



Aug. 14:

We just got back from the Babler family's annual trip to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River. I kept remembering back to last year when Andrew was so very little (and rather unhappy that month). He's such a different kid now. And such a marvel! We did all the regular activities...played games, ate loads of yummy food, floated down the river, and sat outside and watched the stars come out. Andrew stayed out of the river again this year, but maybe in another year or two we'll think of bringing him along in a canoe. It was a fun trip...commemorating Joe's last weekend in Wisconsin before he heads out to Maine for college this fall.

And we were all so much more light-of-heart because of Mom's continued excellent health. Photos of our weekend are in the gallery.



### Joe is off to college (2006-08-18 00:00)



Aug. 18: Dad and I waved goodbye to Joe as he and Mom and Michael pulled out of the drive way and drove down Dennis Drive and they began the long trip to Maine. Joe is off to Bowdoin College this fall, and we are all so very excited for him. Makes me think back a lot to what it was like to leave for college. There are so many unknowns. So much excitement and terror and glee and fear.

After leaving his stuff in his room, Joe will head off for a pre-orientation frosh trip to Acadia National Park for a four day hiking trip. Bryan and I are hoping to head out to visit and to do some camping of our own on the Maine coastline sometime soon. Photos I snapped the day of Joe's departure are in the gallery.

### Our old website's server is toast (2006-08-18 00:00)

Aug. 18: You may have noted over the last week or two that our website has been down. The server upon which it lived has reached the end of its life, and I am in the process of moving to a new hosting service. Ben, our terrific brother-in-law, has hosted our website for the last year and a half. In the next month or two, he'll be trying to retrieve the data from our website off the now-defunct server. In the meantime, I'll start a new site from scratch.

### **Andrew Update - Almost walking! (2006-08-24 00:00)**

Aug. 24: Maybe I should change the title of this post to "first steps." Andrew's been doing incredible baby things this month. He's gotten really engaged and interested in baby sign language, and he just started taking faltering first steps. A little step, a swing of the hip, and "plop" he goes down. Or maybe not. Perhaps he catches himself and then goes down to his knees as if to say, "Phew, what was that!" He can stand up from a squat, and sometimes I look over and he's just standing up in the middle of the room. Such a darling cutie!

Andrew is also really getting into signs. He's not saying much verbally (started saying "down" and "alldone"), but he's really picking up on signs. For those of you not completely immersed in the world of babies, there's a lot of info out these days about teaching babies some basic types of sign language to help them communicate before their verbal skills kick in. Here's a website for more info. Some of Andrew's favorite new signs are "elephant" - arm swinging "hat" - patting his head "airplane" - pointing up at the sky and "frog" - sticking his tongue in and out. I'm working on getting photos, so check back soon.

### **Andrew IS a duck (2006-08-26 00:00)**





Aug. 26: I just uploaded a few new pictures into the gallery including some of Bryan and Andrew playing at the playground, Andrew eating and doing a few signs ("more" and "hot!"), and most cutely, Andrew in his new duck costume. He's such an adorable baby:) Check the gallery for pics.

## 2.9 September

### **Our friends lost their baby (2006-09-13 00:00)**

Sept. 13: I haven't posted in a couple weeks because I've been really sad. Our friends Heather and Michael were expecting a baby boy in late August. To our extraordinary sadness, they found during a routine check-up on September 1 that their baby had no heartbeat. Heather delivered baby Allan Fredrick's body on Saturday, September 2. He was seven pounds, 1/2 ounce and was 20 and 1/2 inches long.

Heather and Michael's family gathered close to them and helped them through their life-altering first week. On Friday, September 8, my brother Michael, our friend Anne, and I drove out to share Heather and Michael's grief. I ended up staying through Tuesday. My mom headed out to Ann Arbor today.

Allan was a beautiful baby. He had a perfect little face with a half-moon chin, big hands and feet, and soft brown hair. I only wish we could have known him more. I feel so lucky that he touched my life, and he will always hold a place in my heart. I hope that by reading this, you may feel closer to Allan and remember him.

And think of Heather and Michael. They have far too much grief to bear.

Andrew is full of wonder (2006-09-13 07:00)



Sept. 13: Being away from Andrew for five days while I was in Ann Arbor with Heather and Michael was pretty hard. In sharing their grief over losing their baby, I really had to put thoughts of Andrew out of my mind, and as time went on, I found that separating Andrew from my thoughts really took a toll on my mind and heart. It made me realize how close to the surface thoughts of him are in everything I do.

When I got back home last night, I pulled Andrew out of his crib and held him. It seemed that he has grown so much in only a few days. He can push his little push toy adroitly all over the house, he can start to make many more words (like a whispered Sss-ooaky for our cat). And Bryan said he learned the sign for "floor." Makes me get a sense for how very hard it must be for Andrew's grandparents and aunts and uncles who don't get to see him as regularly. I want to capture each moment with Andrew in my heart.

During my layover between train and bus in Chicago, I did some therapy shopping for Andrew. I found some cute clothes, but I was a bit chagrined to find that all the 18-24 month clothes are little boy clothes, not baby clothes. And when he wears little boy clothes, he almost doesn't look like my baby any more. But he still sure is cute:) And his curly hair is out-of-control! I love it.

In our gallery, I have pictures of Andrew playing with Clara, my co-worker Pam's daughter, playing with a ball, and eating chocolate chip cookie dough. I also have an album with a photo from my Aunt Julie's wedding and Andrew coloring and playing with Dad.

**Playing with grandparents (2006-09-29 00:00)**



Sept. 29: Granny Lu and Grandpa were in town last weekend, and we all had a really nice time together. The weather didn't really cooperate for trips to the park. But Andrew doesn't need an outing to have a great time with his Granny Lu and Grandad. He showed off his ever-growing walking skills, and he tried on his Halloween duck costume for fun.

Photos of our weekend (from LuAnn...I didn't pick up my camera the whole time) are in the gallery.

**Apple picking and a pumpkin (2006-09-29 00:00)**



Sept. 29: Andrew is taking many steps in a row these days. He lunges a little like a baby Frankenstein, and he crawls about half the time, but he's taking 10-15 steps in a row. It's incredible to see him walk from room to room!

I have some photos in the gallery of a trip to the apple orchard.

Andrew picked his own apple and then proceeded to eat nearly the whole thing. And I pulled out his strawberry and pumpkin hats from last year. When he sees them, he pats the top of his head to tell me he wants me to put it on him.



## 2.10 October

### Halloween Costume Silliness (2006-10-15 00:00)



Oct. 15: This morning Andrew and I set out to amuse some of our neighborhood by dressing him up in his Halloween duck costume and playing in the yard. We made several people laugh:)

I was taking pictures to share with great-grandparents, but now you can enjoy them too. A Halloween prelude!

Andrew's first word was "quack-quack" and "duck." So being a duck for Halloween seemed like a perfect fit. He wasn't too crazy about the hat part of the costume at first, but while we were outside in the leaves, he didn't seem to mind at all.

Must go now. The little guy has piled my shoes and several books in the chair around me. And there is a sus-

picious smell I should investigate...

Happy Halloween planning!

**October is perhaps our favorite month (2006-10-15 01:00)**



Oct. 15: I finally figured out how to log in to my website again! At the end of September, I must have somehow reset the login, and I have been thwarted several times as I tried to update. Happily, we have been home this weekend, and during Andrew's nap, I was able to get it working again.

Our little guy has been getting ever so engaged and active these last weeks. I almost feel like I should change the website category section from Baby News to Little Guy News. He's outgrown nearly all his warm clothes from last year. When I put him in them, they are a bit like high-water pants:) So it's all big-boy overalls and clothes. And he's so amazingly cute!

The last weekend in September, Bryan went to Michigan to spend time in a cabin with some of his Ann Arbor friends. Andrew and I had what seemed like a long date. We went apple picking and went out for pancake breakfasts, went to the zoo, hung out with Grandma, and visited Mum. Pictures of the weekend are in the gallery.

The first weekend in October we traveled to Carleton. I had a two-day meeting for an alumni committee on

which I serve, so Bryan and Andrew spent a couple days exploring campus and Northfield. Andrew ate his own Hogan Brother hoagie. Actually, these days we're ordering him his own children's meals. He's been known to put away an entire hamburger by himself!

Andrew just interrupted me to tell me that he hears an airplane. He points at his ear and then at the sky. Signs for "hear" and "airplane"

Aunt Melanie just sent us an amazing box of Halloween treats. I have pictures in the gallery of Andrew's new Spooky cat slippers, his new Halloween counting book, and many other pictures of the little guy being adorable outside in our front yard. He's getting where he can put his own hat on his head, likes to try to help put his shoes on his feet, and can follow pretty complex requests. In fact, on Friday when we went to visit Bryan at work, part way there I asked Andrew where we were going. His reply, "Dada!"

### **Uncle Joe made a video (2006-10-18 00:00)**

Oct. 18: Uncle Joe made Andrew a video. We had a lot of fun watching it, and I thought you might enjoy it too. Bryan took some great video last night of Andrew watching Joe's show on the laptop and bopping up and down to the movie. He also responded to the pictures...sticking his tongue in and out when he saw the frog, saying duck and quack quack, and he was entranced by the speedy video of Joe running around. Enjoy!



**Baby Halloween Party! (2006-10-29 00:00)**



Oct. 29: We just got back from our second annual baby Halloween party. There were lions, a dog, a cowboy, a dragon, a young republican, a fairy, and a fluffy duck. I went a little crazy taking pictures of all these silly guys. They are so cute!!!

Photos of the Haloween party are in the gallery. I've also posted high resolution photos to [Walgreens.com](http://Walgreens.com), and you can download copies there if you wish. Thanks to Jenny, Tom, and Cora for hosting a really fun event.

**Enjoying these fall days (2006-10-29 01:00)**



Oct. 29: We have had a remarkably lovely set of weekends this fall.

Seems like more often than not, week days are gray and rainy, but then on the weekend we have great weather. We just had Granny Lu and Grandad come visit us, and we had a great time. It's so nice to spend time together and to watch Andrew develop fun rituals with his grandparents. I have a few pictures in the gallery from their visit.

A couple weekends ago I spent the day on Saturday visiting with Heather and Michael, who had come to town to plant a tree at her parent's house in memory of baby Allan. It felt good to see them again. My heart is so heavy with them...

On Sunday, Oct. 15, Bryan and Andrew and I took a family field trip out to Door Creek Apple Orchard and then off to the zoo. Andrew had a great time seeing some sheep at the apple orchard. Then at the zoo, he was pretty entranced by most of the animals. Pictures of the orchard and zoo trips are in our gallery.

I think that I neglected to post a link to our gallery of pictures of the weekend we went to the pumpkin patch with Andrew. Our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm - Vermont Valley Community Farm - has several farm days. We missed most of them this year, but earlier this month we made it to the pumpkin pick. Andrew sure was cute, stumbling around the field. Afterwards, we got him his first pair of hard-soled shoes. Pictures of the pumpkin pick are in the gallery.

Last weekend we went up to St. Paul to see Maretta in her play, *The Haunting of Hill House*. She was terrific, and it was so fun to see her in action. We had a nice visit with her and with Kyle. We rounded off the weekend with a trip to the Underwater Adventures Aquarium. I especially liked the underwater tunnel where you could see sharks,

turtles, and all sorts of cool sea creatures swim around us. I think, however, that I was a bit more impressed than Andrew.

Bryan is out raking leaves now, and I should probably dig up my dahlia and plant some tulip bulbs! Happy fall!

## 2.11 November

### Differences of opinion (2006-11-06 00:00)

Nov. 6: Andrew is rapidly growing into a little boy. A little boy with Opinions. For example, this evening, my little boy had an opinion about the state of the items on his bedroom shelves. "Off the shelves" was his thought. Therefore, all the board books, the paper books, the toys, the stuffies, everything was forcibly removed from the shelves to the floor. He accomplished this with rapid sweeps of his arm.

"Off the shelves," you could almost see his little mind saying.

Now his mama who was sitting in the room with him had other thoughts.

"Read a book," she thought. "Play with Noah's ark," was another thought. "Let's be silly and roll around on the floor," was a third. But to these vapid suggestions, the little boy with Opinions said gently but firmly, "Nonono." The directive that we don't treat our toys so roughly and wildly chuck our toys around the room was met with a rather obstinate and definitely negative response.

I guess the Mama is continuing to learn that her little boy has his own ways of playing with toys and the little boy is learning that sometimes reading books with the Mama is at least as fun as causing widespread room destruction.

The End

### A post from Ann Arbor (2006-11-12 00:00)

Nov. 12: I usually post to this website from my living room after having uploaded scores of recent pictures of Andrew. This time, I'm writing from Heather and Michael's comfy couch in Ann Arbor. I came out to spend the weekend with them...they have such a hard road to travel since they lost Allan at 40 weeks of pregnancy. He was born on Sept. 2, but it feels to me like it was just last week. I just don't know how a person goes about trying to overcome that kind of a loss. Their love for Allan is a reflection of their grief. And there is so much love. They are both exhibiting amazing strength and fortitude and bravery. Amidst the grief, it feels good to be with them.

While I am here, I am missing my own little guy. I fall asleep trying to decide which way he is lying in his crib, whether he has his pacifier in, or if his legs are akimbo through the crib bars. I imagine his sweet smell, and I see him in my mind toddling down the hall, a mission in his mind. Before going to bed tonight, I had to come look at some pictures of my little guy. This is my third night away, and I miss him. It makes me smile though, to know what a good

dad Bryan is and what fun they are having together. I like thinking of my two favorite boys spending the day together. I love them both so much. And now, good night:)

**He's learning so much every day! (2006-11-13 00:00)**



Nov 13: I am shocked at how much Andrew changed in the few days I was gone. He seems more worldly to me. He can tell me about so many things. I got home last night while he was in the tub. "Bat!" he kept saying to me. And then he showed me his tub toys and wash cloths.

It seems to me like he has gone from just being able to point to things that I name to now being able to, in his own little baby babble, tell me about all his toys. And he is quite earnest about it all. It feels just fantastic to be back at home with him again.

There was a good snowfall here over the weekend. Bryan took some video of Andrew playing out in the snow. At some point here, I might see if I can figure out how to upload video to my webpage. I just downloaded the pictures from Halloween.

We took pictures at daycare and as we trick-or-treated around our neighborhood.

This way you can see yet more pictures of Andrew in his duck costume. I also have a few pictures of Bryan and Andrew reading and of Andrew playing with his new favored toy, his Ark from Granny Lu and Grandad.

"AAHK!" he says.

### **Ahh...nap time (2006-11-19 00:00)**

Nov. 19: Andrew's eye teeth are coming in. He has been a very drooly boy the last week, and yesterday I saw the peek of a new tooth on one side. Last night and the night before he was up and very unhappy in the night. Poor boy...it's hard to know he is hurting. And I really would think that getting new teeth would hurt! Bryan has been out of town this weekend, and both Friday and Saturday, Andrew really didn't want to do the napping thing. Makes for some pretty long days. But about an hour ago, he looked at his crib and said, "pAh" (pacifier). I asked him if he wanted to nap and he said "nAh." Then he blissfully, quietly went to sleep.

And I am now taking this moment of quiet not to progress on any of my household needs or to-lists. I'm browsing the internet and reading about toddlers. That and letting my brain drift quietly about without worrying about Andrew destroying himself or durable household items.

I think I need to work on consistency about what Andrew is and is not allowed to do. His Opinions are all-consuming for him, and last week's passion is not necessarily an interest this week. So I'm trying to figure out what behaviors to promote, which ones to ignore, which ones to really not want him to do but ignore, and which ones to stop.

And where is the line between "that is not allowed" and "that is not a good idea, let's do something else"? Can I keep those behaviors straight in my mind? What if tomorrow a "not good idea" drives me crazy and then it breaks his heart because he tells me (with his eyes), "You let me do that before!!"

Or worse, when I let a "not allowed" behavior go because I'm tired or because he is cute or because circumstances make it difficult to effectively re-direct his very directed brain. hmmm

Our current conundrum is that Andrew likes throwing his toys down the basement stairs. Wait, he LOVES throwing his toys down the basement stairs. It's an activity that excites him so much he pants. And it is kind of a fascinating study in physics. Soft cat toys land with a soft thump a few steps down. Toy cars make a tremendous, very satisfying racket as they knock against every step. Balls bounce down the stairs and roll all around the floor at the bottom. Plastic creatures bang nicely and make fall far or near depending on how they hit the stairs. Playing cards float or fall. I would guess there are 40 toys on our basement stairs right now.

But the baby gate at the top of the stairs is only so safe. And if he somehow broke the gate and fell down the stairs (like his dad did when he was a baby)...well that could be catastrophic beyond imagining. So clearly as a responsible parent, I shouldn't let him do this. Or at least I shouldn't encourage it. I definitely shouldn't stand at the top of the stairs and say, "Wow! That one was loud!"

But the last few days I've thoroughly confused Andrew by alternating between forbidding, attempting distraction, and condoning the throwing the toys down the basement stairs game. Setting the stage for a lifetime of consistent, dependable discipline.

Maybe next week he will pick a new behavior to try out, and myself, being a little wiser this time will step up my parenting know-how and resolve a bit. It's amazing the things that occupy my mind!



Althea

### Happy Thanksgiving (2006-11-24 00:00)



Nov. 24: Greetings from warm and sunny Texas!

We are basking in the weather and in the company of Bryan's mom and dad and Melanie and Ben. Our flight down here went really well, and Andrew has really been enjoying playing outdoors and hanging out with family. Oh, and eating!

Yesterday we played Bocce ball, Andrew kicked a ball around the yard, he and Grandad dug in the dirt, and we made and ate loads of yummy food. Andrew enjoyed his first Thanksgiving meal. He even had three spoonfuls of cranberry sauce (by the third bite, he determined that he was done with cranberries for about a year). Photos in the gallery show our day.

We have so many things to be thankful for this year. First in my mind are that my mommy is well, followed closely by my continued overwhelming gratitude for Andrew. I'm glad we are encouraged to pause this time of year to think about our dear family and friends.

Our lives are made so rich because of you. Thanks to all of you!

**On vacation (2006-11-25 00:00)**



Nov. 25: We've been having a fabulous time relaxing at Granny Lu and Grandad's house. Andrew is having loads of fun playing with his loving relatives, and Bryan and I are basking in the ability to play on the computer or play cards or generally be lazy.

Bryan's cousin Darren, his wife Erin, and their kids, Kevin and Ryan, came over yesterday, and we spent a really nice afternoon together. Kevin is four, and Ryan is 20 months old, so with three kids in the house, we had a lot of energy flowing!

We've been taking loads of pictures all weekend, and I posted ones from the last couple days on our website. Enjoy!



## 2.12 December

### Phase I of website retrieval complete (2006-12-06 07:05)

Dec. 6: I am delighted to report that Ben has helped me retrieve our website from the now defunct server on which it previously lived. All of my old posts including all Andrew's early reports and all Mom's health updates are now back.

Our photo gallery is not yet functional, and I think it will take a few steps to get it running. Thanks to Ben for rescuing our website and for helping me to get it up again.

### Fun with Christmas trees (2006-12-06 21:08)

Dec. 6: Andrew is thoroughly amused with our decision to bring a tree in to our living room. For the first couple days after it came home, Andrew decided that the water at the base of the tree was his own personal splash pond. Repeatedly pulling him back by his overall straps didn't have much affect other than focusing his resolve. That was fun.

Then once we lit and decorated the tree, he's been so fascinated with that part of the tree that he seems to have (at least temporarily) forgotten about the water. He's very into the tree. He likes to lean in and sniff at the lights. Let me tell you, it's a cute sight to see. He tells me about the ornaments he sees 'tars" (stars) "bear" "meow" "maaaa" (sheep). When we first brought it home, he was trying to figure out what kinds of things we put in the tree. He's been trying to put all sorts of things in the tree. Throwing Bryan's shoes into the tree was one plan. These days he likes to put his teddy bear, small books, and mail into the tree. Sometimes they even stick.

It's also been fun to share our Christmas music box (from Aunt Kate and Uncle Greg) with Andrew. He loves it. He listens, cocks his head, and asks for "moh, MOH!"

Happy Christmas planning to you all!

### Lovely Christmas weekend (2006-12-10 14:41)



Dec. 10: Ahhh, it's Sunday and the end of a lovely weekend with my little and my big family. On Friday (my day off), Mom, Dad, Andrew, and I went to Olbrich Gardens to see their model train exhibit. It was really beautiful, and Andrew had a wonderful time. He couldn't get enough of watching the trains buzz around the tracks. I think we'll go back with Dada soon. Photos are in the gallery.

This afternoon, Michael, Bryan, Andrew, and I helped Mom and Dad pick out a Christmas tree. Michael got one too for his house. While shopping, we ran into Herr Huxmann, our old German/history high school teacher. Then we went to Rocky's for lunch, and Michael and I helped Mom and Dad set up the tree while we watched A Muppet's Christmas. It struck me as pretty funny that Michael and I are the two ones home these days. A flashback to 1984.

Andrew spent the weekend reading books, playing with ornaments, and having a jolly time. He loves looking at the tree, and it's so fun to share the celebrations of the season with him. Our outdoor lights are up now (it's warm this weekend!), and we're about ready for our neighborhood holiday party here on Wednesday. Happy Holidays!

### Christmas activities (2006-12-18 20:58)

Dec. 18: Today is my dad's birthday, and we celebrated by getting together for dinner at our place. Mom made all the food and brought it over. I told her that I'm always happy to have a dinner party at my house when I don't have

to do a thing to get ready for it! Dessert was chocolate fondue with good dippings. mmmm See a quick video here:

Andrew has been having a lot of fun with Christmas activities. The novelty of the tree has worn off. After we decorated the tree, he completely forgot about the tree water/splash pool, and at this point, he leaves most of the ornaments alone too. Last week we had a neighborhood holiday party/cookie exchange at our house. He had fun playing, and Bryan and I really enjoyed spending a warm evening with our friends whom we don't see much when the weather turns cold.

I had my Gathering Waters holiday party last week as well, and we had the three 2005 Gathering Babies in the same place for the first time since last winter. Clara, Alex, and Andrew sure are an amazing set of cuties. And Andrew really enjoyed the food at the party.

Last weekend, we took another visit to Olbrich Gardens holiday train exhibit. Andrew had a blast watching the trains and running around in the conservatory. It's so fun to watch him gain confidence and navigate his own little way in the world. He knew how to wiggle right up to the trains...meanwhile I'm on my tiptoes several bodies back, trying to keep an eye on him!

We've started sharing some presents with him. Tonight he opened a couple gifts from Aunt Kate. And he played with them all evening. What a fun kid!

Karen called me this afternoon to tell me that Andrew had climbed to the top of the play structure today. How does he get these ideas that he is a big boy? It constantly shocks me!

The weather was so warm this past weekend that we spent quite a bit of time outdoors. We (finally) raked our lawn, and Andrew had a blast playing in the leaves. Then we went to the playground for the first time in a couple months. He had a lot of fun going down the slide, playing on the swings, and going through the tunnel. And he really didn't want to leave!

Christmas is coming, and it's so fun to share the magic with our little guy.

Happy wishes to you all!

Althea

### **Dotzour family letter (2006-12-18 21:02)**

For the second year, I sent out a letter with my Christmas cards. Thought I would post it here as well.

Dear Family and Friends,

As I write this note, I am reminded how worried we were about my mom's health in early December 2005. Then on January 11, we kicked off the new year with my mom's surgery at Mayo. Since that day, pancreatic cancer has been something we are moving past rather than wading through. What a difference! I know we all offer mom's surgeon, Dr. Michael Farnell our unending gratitude for making our mommy well. Since January, Mom underwent another round of chemo, participated in an immunization clinical trial, and has had really positive test results. What a happy Christmas we are having!

My siblings have all had an exciting year too. Michael took on a new job as an IT manager for Excel Inns. He also bought a nice house in Madison with three of his friends—he's now a home-owner! Maretta is a junior at St. Kate's in St. Paul. Last March, she and her sweetie, Kyle Zilic, got engaged with a wedding planned for May 2008. We're so excited! Joe graduated from high school this year, leaving the De Forest school district bereft of Bablers for the first time since 1983. In August, Joe moved to Maine where he is now a student at Bowdoin College. We're looking forward to having him back home over his winter break.

We were lucky enough this past year to have lots of visits with Bryan's parents. It has been so much fun to watch Andrew develop a joyous relationship with his Granny Lu and Grandad. Bryan and I always appreciate having extra hands on deck during our times together. Melanie and Ben are doing really well in Dallas. Ben's job continues to evolve and grow, and they adopted a new kitten named Smudge to join kitty Chulo and puppy Toby. In November, they purchased a Curves franchise in Frisco, which Melanie will run. We are excited to have business owners in the family!

Andrew, of course, is the bright star amidst our days. He has grown so much in the last year! It is hard to believe that this talking, walking kid was trying to sit up 12 months ago! He has been thrilled with all the Christmas decorations and traditions that we are sharing with him.

Bryan and I have had a nice year. We're enjoying our ever-evolving jobs at Widen and at Gathering Waters Conservancy. The high points of our days are a) playing with, reading to, and chasing after Andrew and b) flopping down in exhaustion after he's gone to bed.

If we haven't gotten to see you recently, I hope our paths cross soon. In the meantime, I keep our website stocked with pictures and updates that feature the activities of little Andrew and family. Check it out at [bryanandalthea.dotzour.com](http://bryanandalthea.dotzour.com).

On behalf of our Dotzour clan, I wish you a very Merry Christmas!

## Merry Christmas...time to rest! (2006-12-25 19:02)



Dec. 25: It is with a grateful sigh that Bryan and I are now resting in a mostly darkened living room after a multitude of holiday festivities. The treelight glows, the kitty purrs, and all is quiet. A nice way to end a couple fun, festive, and somewhat frantic days of holiday celebration.

New photos are in the gallery from last week and the last couple days.

We spoke to Bryan's parents this morning. They are in Wichita, spending Christmas with their parents and Lu-Ann's brothers' families. Ben and Melanie are also in Wichita with his family. We miss them all, but Andrew enjoyed looking over photos of our last Christmas together as a reminder of the fun times we have had in the past. Andrew's attention span for looking at pictures is somewhat remarkable. I think he must have gotten that from me:)

On Christmas Eve, we had my family over for dinner. It was a lot of fun to invite others to our home for a major holiday meal. We ate our traditional beef stew on mashed potatoes alongside way too many other dishes. After dinner, we sang a bit, opened presents, and then tried out Bryan's new poker chips with a few rounds of family poker.

This morning we work bright and early to find some presents from Santa under our tree. Andrew wasn't so sure about the sit-and-ride horse we got him, but he was pretty interested in the wooden dinosaur magnets, a xylophone, and a Fischer-Price farm. At 8:30, we headed over to my parents and saw what Santa brought there. Andrew was particularly excited about a new wooden puzzle. I liked my new mistletoe, and Bryan got some golf ball finding glasses.

By 10:30, we headed down to Monroe to see Grandma, Grandpa, Julie, Kevin, and Gary. Julie and Kevin provided a

massive feast for us all, which we ate with gusto. Andrew even liked the gingered cranberries. Grandpa has been in and out of the hospital and nursing home the past few weeks, so we all took turns visiting him at the nursing home.

We got back from Grandma's in time for Andrew's bath and bedtime. And as I said when I started, now Bryan and I are in some form of collapse in the living room. What fun Christmas celebrations we had!

I hope your Christmas was tinted with the makings of delightful memories.



## 3. 2007

### 3.1 January

#### Blast from the past (2007-01-01 21:24)

Jan. 1: I sit here on New Year's Day eve, going through the files on my laptop. I ran across a couple old websites that I thought I might post here for general entertainment. The first is a website I made in 1999 just as I was about to graduate from college. I put together a site documenting all my favorite toys from the '80s. You can find it at [bryanandalthea.dotzour.com/toys](http://bryanandalthea.dotzour.com/toys).

(note that for complete authenticity, I left all spelling errors for your reading pleasure.)

The other site that I've uploaded is a website ([zour.com](http://zour.com)) that Bryan and I used when we first moved to Ann Arbor. It covers 2000 and 2001. Some of the links may not work, but there are some pretty cute pictures of the kitties when they were small. Enjoy!



**Happy New Year! (2007-01-01 21:32)**



Jan 1: We had a nice time this year...ushering out 2006 and welcoming 2007. Bryan, Andrew, and I spent the evening with Sarah and Wes. We played games, sang along with Kareoke Revolution, and generally had a really nice time. We have spent many of the last eight new years together, and it's a fun night to spend with good friends. On New Years Day, I got to meet Heather and Michael's new puppy, Pippin. Photos of Pippin and of Andrew doing cute things are in the gallery.

**Off to Jack's (2007-01-04 21:55)**

Jan. 4: After 15 days of vacation, I went back to work on Wednesday. I wasn't sure how it would feel to return to the world of the working after such a long and wonderful vacation at home with my little boy, but I'm pleased to report that we're all doing very well. It helps to be returning to a job that I enjoy so much! This weekend, we're heading out to Jack's with my family. There's no snow, so instead of skiing, we'll be hoping to do some hiking. I've got Andrew's backpack in the van and ready to go. Have a good one!

Back from Jack's (2007-01-07 15:41)



Jan. 7: We just returned back from Jack's house this afternoon. What a laughter-filled couple of days we have had! Terry couldn't attend this trip, but Maretta and Kyle drove down from St. Paul. Mom, Joe, and Michael joined the Dotzours, and we caravanned to Jack's together in our van. The weather was very-nearly balmy, and we enjoyed several fun hikes including a long hike on Jack's land and a trip over to Pike's Peak in Iowa. We ate yummy food, played lots of games (poker with Bryan's new chips and Trivial Pursuit), and all had fun entertaining Andrew. Plus we got to see loads of Bald Eagles (at least six including one sitting and bathing for a long time on a log in the river in front of Jack's house).

Thanks to Jack for hosting a lovely, restorative weekend for our family! Many photos of our revelry are in the gallery.

**Fist illness of the winter (2007-01-13 08:25)**



Jan. 13: The weather may not feel a lot like winter, but I think we've hit our first winter virus. Andrew started running a fever yesterday, and he woke up this morning feeling like a very sick boy. Fortunately, thanks to the magic of Tylenol, he's up and running around the house now. He just found three pacifiers under his bed, so he has one in his mouth and one in each hand. He was just playing with his piggy bank, and he has been distributing the trucks from his Granny Lu-made book. Now he has climbed up on the rocking chair to read some books. Pictures of the last week are in the gallery.

The last week, he has decided to alter out bedtime routine a bit. Instead of reading him three books, he now wants to read them himself. So he climbs up into the rocking chair (all by himself!) and reads himself three books while I sit on the floor nearby. Then I pick him up and set him in bed. He is definitely getting some serious ideas about how he wants things done!

Mom and I went boot shopping on Thursday night, and while we had a fun time together, I was unable to find any good brown knee-high boots...except a great pair of Frey boots, but that's a bit out of my range!

I think with Andrew being under the weather that we'll be sticking pretty close to home this weekend. Hope your (perhaps 3-day) weekend is good!

Althea

**Young Andrew is starting to feel better (2007-01-16 07:45)**



Jan. 16: It's been a sick weekend in the Dotzour home. The fever Andrew started running on Friday got worse over the weekend. We kept him dosed up on medicine (or "meh sin" as he calls it), and we watched videos nearly constantly as this activity was one of the only that didn't result in anguished tantrums. While he was sick, reading books, playing with toys, doing puzzles, or just sitting on the floor together could instantly turn bad if the book wasn't held just so or the puzzle piece wouldn't fit in fast enough. I think that being sick just took away his tolerance for things not going according to his (private) plan.

So I now have *Animals are Beautiful People* nearly committed to memory. Fortunately it doesn't seem that his illness was anything more than a relatively benign virus. And Andrew is certainly on the upswing today. We're playing with his Ark as I type:) What a relief it is to have him feeling better! Photos of sick Andrew in various reclined positions are in the gallery.

**Waiting (2007-01-16 13:58)**

On January 11 - exactly one year after Mom's wonderfully successful surgery, she received word that her blood counts indicate that the pancreatic cancer is reasserting itself. CA 19.9 is a

Mom has a CT scan scheduled for Wednesday, and she has a doctor's appointment with her oncologist, Dr. Michael Frontiera on Thursday.

\*\* NOTE: I did not publish this note until after my mom's passing. The tumor marker CA 19.9 is not really a diagnostic tool, and Mom chose not to share with almost everyone that the number was going up.

She told me while the two of us were shopping the after Christmas sales at JC Penny's. After telling me, she asked if I wanted to go to the JC Penny's photo studio to get a photo of the two of us. My heart broke. And I declined the photo offer. And hugged I her and told her it would be alright. And then we continued shopping.



Snow Day! (2007-01-21 14:09)



Jan. 21: I'm watching snowflakes drift lazily through the air outside our house. The pine trees look like they belong in a gingerbread scene, and the maples are etched in a pure line of white. I just love snow!

Andrew is better from his fever last week, and we are having a fun-filled weekend together. Uncle Joe (or as Andrew calls him "Doe!") left to go back to college this morning. We sure have had a fun time with him over the last month. Then around noon today we "played" outdoors in the snow while Dada shoveled. It's pretty hard to walk in snow with all these puffy clothes on! I put pictures in the gallery from our weekend.

**Baby Winter Party (2007-01-21 14:27)**



Jan. 21: Last night we had a great time spending a few hours with our Happy Bambino baby friends. The kids are all getting so big, and it was amazing (if a bit overwhelming) to watch them all buzzing about the party. The acoustics were that of a happy (and sometimes sad) group of 18 to 19 month-olds. Thanks to Denise, Nate, and Jaya for opening their home for the party. I am so happy and grateful to have such a wonderful group of parents and kids as my friends.

Some photos of the event are in the gallery.

**Uneventful week (2007-01-27 18:48)**



Jan. 27: Now if that isn't an inspiring title for a post, I don't know what is! But as I think back over the last week, my take-home sense is one of ordinary regular-ness. It's nice to hit a stride every once in a while where things at work and things at home are all chugging along at a steady pace.

On Friday, Andrew and I took a little trip over to Olbrich Gardens where Andrew always has a blast looking at the koi and walking up and down the stairs. Today, Mom and Andrew and I went to Oconomowoc to attend my Aunt Julie's husband Kevin's father's memorial service. Bryan has been pretty swamped at work recently, but he's pretty committed to seeing projects work well even if it means putting extra evenings in.

We got several household projects fixed this week. Our garbage disposal is now working for the first time in over a year. We got components of our garage door replaced, so now the garage door opener works again, and Igor (the white car) got a major set of repairs made. After all these fixes, I'm feeling a relieved sense that everything we own isn't falling apart.

Pictures of the last week are in the gallery including some photos of a housewarming party we attended for my co-worker, Sara and her husband, Sean. What a lovely place they have!

**Thinking of a puppy (2007-01-28 12:16)**



Jan. 28: I have been thinking a lot of my friends Heather and Michael and of their new puppy, Pippin these last few weeks. Heather and Michael got Pippin for Christmas as a gift from Heather's father. After losing their son, Allan in September, Heather and Michael have had to find ways to make it through the last five months. Pippin was bringing some fun and puppy love into the mix. To my disbelief, Pippin came down with the Canine Parvovirus five days after he got home. Parvo is a sometimes deadly virus that can strike puppies before they are old enough to be vaccinated. After almost a week in veterinary ICU, Pippin came home. Since then, however, he has had complications including an auto-immune allergic reaction which affected his blood vessels, and last night Heather called to tell me that Pippin's kidneys are failing. He has been at the emergency clinic where they are working hard to save him. But it is just so sad for a little puppy to be so sick and it is so unfair for Heather and Michael to have to navigate this after all that they have recently been through.

I wanted to post this because it has been very heavy on my mind and because I thought that it wouldn't hurt to encourage others to send loving thoughts their way.

## 3.2 February

### Greetings from Texas! (2007-02-05 08:43)

Feb. 5: Andrew is enjoying a story from his Granny Lu, so I thought I would take a moment to post an update and to say "Yay! A little vacation in Texas!" I spoke to our neighbor Nancy yesterday, and she said there was a wind chill advisory until Tuesday. I do love winter, but it sure is nice to be out in the sun and the warmth for a few days. We played frisbee and ball in the yard yesterday, and I watched people jog or bike by in t-shirts and shorts. It seems strange to see people's legs again after months of hiding:)

Good news about Heather's dog Pippin. As of Friday, he home and doing really well. Sounds like he has beat a lot of odds, and while he's not out of the woods yet, Heather and Michael are really enjoying having him home.

I'm also really very relieved because Andrew's little friend, Eli, was in the hospital much of last week with pneumonia. He was such a sick little boy, and we were all very worried. But last I heard, he came home on Saturday, and is on the road to recovery.

At my work we have some new happenings as well. Our new executive director starts at Gathering Waters today, so I have now completed my tenure as interim executive director. It was a great experience. Now I return to outreach and policy coordination just in time for the state budget. Should be an exciting six months policy-wise.

We hope to take a walk down to the park once the sun heats things up a bit. It's in the 40s now, but I'm hoping for warmer temps in an hour or so. That's the update from College Station!

Althea



Brrrr (2007-02-06 16:15)



Feb. 6: We just got home after a wonderful visit in Texas with Bryan's family. Even though it was a quick visit, we had a lot of fun together. And we're basking in our memories of warm weather now that we are back in the Frozen North. The snow here is beautiful, and our street is decked out in its perfect winter scene. So I look out on it and remember warm sunshine, birds singing, pansies and dandelions, and the promise of spring.

Bryan's mom headed up to Wichita today to stay with her mom while Grandpa Harvey undergoes knee replacement surgery. Dandy, Bryan's dad's father is back home after breaking his elbow and being in rehab for a while. And on my side, Mum is now in assisted living and Grandpa is in a nursing home. It's a tough time to be one of our grandparents. I'm so glad that our parents are all strong and able to care for their moms and dads during this time in their lives.

I put loads of pictures from our trip to Texas up on our website. There's also a sub-album of a trip we took to the park. And looking back at January, I have a little album of Andrew eating spaghetti and some pictures of our wintery yard. Enjoy!



Chilly weather, warm sweater (2007-02-11 14:08)



Feb. 11: We're enjoying a nice, somewhat quiet weekend at home. I worked on Friday (normally my day home with Andrew) since we were on vacation in Texas on Monday and Tuesday. It was fun to have our new executive director, Mike, to fill up the long-vacant office. Now we have a full-house again.

Yesterday morning Andrew and I went to Kids in the Rotunda at the Overture Center and heard a performance of the Harmonious Wail. It was great music, and a really packed, fun event. Then we went up to visit with Terry for a while. During Andrew's afternoon nap, Mom and I went to Macy's (Marshall Fields shall rest in peace), and I got myself a few fun items to bring some life back into my wardrobe. Maretta...we need to talk...I think I need to borrow a few items from you. Then after Andrew woke up from his nap, we went to Janesville for a visit with Mum. She was feeling great, and we took her to dinner at Culvers. It was a fun time. This morning, we hopped over to Olbrich gardens for a romp around the conservatory.

Pictures in the gallery include some cute ones of Andrew in the new sweater that he just got from my mom. She's been working on it for quite some time, and the results are incredible. Andrew loves wearing it, and it makes him look just adorable. Enjoy!

**Snowy Valentine (2007-02-22 19:55)**



Feb. 22: The last several weeks, the weather has shifted from deep wintery cold to springlike balmy. Andrew has been putting on his "buhts" (boots) and walking out in the "noh-s" (snow). It was pretty cute to watch him walking around in the backyard with the snow coming up to his knees. Now there are "mahl-s" (small) footprints all around the yard.

Last weekend, Bryan and I took a trip sans-Andrew to Chicago. The little guy and my mom had a really fun couple of days. Bryan and I enjoyed a quiet couple of days hanging around in Chicago. Photos from the last week are in the gallery.

Last weekend, my co-worker Sara and her husband Sean held a party at their new home to inaugurate their new chocolate fountain. It was the first time we have had all the Gathering Waters kids together. Shara, Egon, Alex, Andrew, Evelyn, and Clara. Photos of the gang are in the gallery.

**Neighborhood shovel-out (2007-02-26 18:26)**



Feb. 26: About 15 inches of snow fell in Madison over the weekend. When we woke up on Sunday morning, we discovered a world full of very wet, very deep snow. In shoveling ourselves out, though, I was reminded how much I love our neighbors, and how fun it can be to do hard work when you have friends to help along the way. The prospect of removing the snow from our driveway was quite daunting. Plus the snowplow had created a mountain about four feet high at the end of each driveway. In barn-raising fashion, though, our neighbors came over and without a word began to use their snow blower to clean up our driveway. Those of us without snow blowers worked on the end-of-driveway mountains. It's been months since I have seen much of my neighbors, but on Sunday we spent several hours talking and shoveling and helping each other dig out. I have been feeling happy ever since. Photos of the kids playing on the snow mountain at the end of the street and of Andrew and Alivia are in the gallery. Happy winter!

**Andrew's friends (2007-02-26 18:43)**



Feb. 26: Andrew got to see many of his friends this past weekend, and it was such fun to watch him interact with other kids his age. Pictures of the kids are in the gallery.

On Friday morning, Eli and Jessica came over for a little visit. Andrew looks at this picture and says, "Tickle!" Andrew and Eli had fun knocking Andrew's piggy bank off the coffee table and laughing when it CRASHED on the floor. When they left, Andrew said, "I E I. Piggy."

Later that day Clara (my co-worker Pam's daughter) came over for the evening. Clara is younger than Andrew (he is 20 months and she is 14 months), and it was quite bemusing to watch him showing off for her. "Look at how wild and crazy I can be!" he seemed to be saying. Clara is so petite; it was startling to see my baby look like such a large kid next to her!

On Sunday we hosted a little Academy Award watching party. All weekend Andrew would find phone-shaped objects, pick them up, and say, "Ello? Par-tee! Ello?" Mike and Molly came with their daughter, 19-month-old Evelyn. Andrew and Evie had great fun racing around the house and staying up past their bedtimes. Parties are GREAT!



### 3.3 March

Winter Magic (2007-03-05 17:50)



March 5: Bryan was at a conference in Milwaukee all weekend, so Andrew and I had a mom-and-boy weekend together. One highlight for me was the ten minutes we spent looking out the window and listening for our new neighborhood owls. I'd lit some candles, and the sun was setting. Venus was super bright and the white snow reflected the bright blue of the evening sky. We had heard the Great Horned Owls hooting earlier (listen here for their lovely call) in the evening, and as we sat listening and watching the still outdoors, Andrew kept whispering "ooowwlll" "cahndahls" "owl".

Another new and completely, disarmingly wonderful activity Andrew has taken up is saying, "Buddies!" He spreads his arms out and wants a group hug. For example, "Mama, Dada. BUDDIES!" While we're all hugging, he often softly repeats to himself, "buddies..." Andrew is really starting to hug where he grabs both of my shoulders and pulls me to him. I was telling Bryan that it is things like that which take all the sting out of the fact that he is growing up. He is becoming such a wonderful little boy.

Pictures from the last week - messy eating, playing with Grandma, and rolling around in the snow - are in the gallery.

## Phase II of website retrieval complete (2007-03-15 17:53)

March 15: To my great delight, the gallery photo albums I made prior to August 2006 have been restored to the Dotzour Family Website. Now the "Peak in the Gallery" images you see on the left may pull from Andrew's early days. As you may remember, in August the server in which our website had been living met the end of its life. We started a new website from scratch. In January, our wonderful brother-in-law, Ben, was able to retrieve the database that housed all the posts I had made since I launched our family website in May 2005 (see the post from that happy day). Then this past weekend, Ben helped me pull the photo albums from my old site into the current gallery. A handful of the albums didn't make it, but I now feel like this iteration of my website is running at full steam. Many thanks to Ben for hosting our website for the first year, and special appreciation for helping retrieve our data from the defunct server. Let me know if you have suggestions for how I could make this site more fun or friendly!

## Counting down to spring (2007-03-15 18:20)



March 15: It seems to me that nearly every day Andrew does something that seems worthy of a website post. I file these moments in my mind, but now I am finding that when I sit down to share them with his adoring public that I'm not sure what to say. The snow is melting...that's a big one. It was super warm earlier this week, and our feet of snow have shrunk to inches of snow. Lovely new daylight savings time has given us more light in the evening, and Andrew is having fun walking through increasingly mushy snow in his "BOOTS!" He's also counting a lot. "One, six, seveneight, nine, TEN!"



Photos from the last week are in the gallery. They include some pictures of a recent wintry trip to Olbrich Gardens and a visit from Andrew's buddy Wyatt.

The neighborhood owl(s) continue to hoot, hoot, hoot in the evenings, and it makes for a lovely end of the day. As we leave the house in the mornings, I entice Andrew out the door by encouraging him to go outside to hear the birds sing. And sing they do! Andrew notes that they say "cheep cheep." He has a cute accent, and I love the way he says, "berds. sing-ing. berds. cheep cheep."

We've been working with him on two-word sentences, but he's pretty into the one word world. He also always repeats the last word you say, so if I parrot back something to him, encouraging him to repeat me, he nearly always happily says the last word.

Andrew is still doing multi-person hugs, spreading his arms wide and animatedly saying "Buddies!" What a great way to start or end a day:)

We went to Monore last weekend to visit my grandpa and grandma, and when we visited my grandpa in the hospital, he was in ICU and was all hooked up to tubes and he was in pain and it was all a little scary. My mom and I stood near Grandpa, holding his hand, stroking his head, and generally offering comfort. Andrew was pretty unsure about the situation, but he seemed to understand that Grandpa was someone who we love. So he held his great-grandpa's finger and even gave him a hug and kiss several times. It really warmed my heart to see my little guy being so kind and compassionate despite being a little nervous.

One other little story I wanted to write down for posterity. When we are driving to Karen's in the morning, we get in the car and Andrew starts asking for his favorite song, Drip, drip, drop. He gets increasingly worried, saying, "Drip. DRIP. DRIP!" Unfortunately, that particular CD lives in his dad's car, so we had to make do without it. The big highlight of our three minute drive to Karen's house is when we get to see Lake Monona. We talk about it from the moment we leave the driveway. Andrew says "lake" in such a way that it sounds a lot like "ick." As we get close to the lake, he gets increasingly excited. When we see it, he tells me about how it is "frozen" with "ice." He also may or may not mention "fishies" "snoring sound" (meaning they are sleeping)...don't know where he came up with that one... "wahter" or "gators." What a great kid!

Those are some of the stories I can think of today. I look forward to seeing what he comes up with for tomorrow:)

## Sleeping late (2007-03-18 05:54)



March 18: I woke up this morning with a start. It was 7:35 am, and both Bryan and I were asleep in bed. Since Andrew normally wakes up sometime between 6:30 and 7:00, and since I don't believe he has ever in his life slept past 7:10, I kind of panicked that something had happened to him. I leapt out of bed and raced into his room, and there he was, soundly sleeping at 7:35 am. He was bunched into a corner and had his "bankie" tucked under his arm. What a sweetheart. Tiptoeing out of his room, I thought I'd pop on the computer as long as I was now wide awake! Fifteen minutes later, I still have a lot of adrenaline pumping through my body. I can hear that he's woken up now, and he found the books at the foot of his bed. He's reading them out loud to himself. What a sweetie. Hope your St. Patrick's Days was a good one. What a fun and happy holiday. It will be such fun to share the excitement of holidays (especially St. Patrick's Day since it is my favorite) with Andrew as he grows. Pictures from the last few days including some of his daycare pals and a big Babler family celebration are in the gallery.

**We've passed the equinox (2007-03-23 11:50)**



March 23: I have a hard time believing a week has gone by. I've been so busy, having fun and hanging out with my siblings and cranking away at work. I hope this weekend gives me a few moments to find some quiet. I've just uploaded two new photo albums to the gallery. The last one in the Winter 2007 album, and the first one in the Spring 2007 album. At some point here, I also hope to find an easy way to post video. I take lots of video clips of Andrew with our camera, and I'd like to share those too.

A quick synopsis of some of the fun activities in the past week: Last Sunday, I helped host a baby shower for my good friend Liza. She's expecting a baby boy in early May. I finished knitting her baby blanket just in time for the shower! Maretta and Joe watched Andrew on Monday morning, and Monday afternoon, I took off work to hang out with Michael, Maretta, and Joe. The five of us (including Andrew) celebrated Michael's birthday at Pedro's, and then we went to a walk down to our neighborhood park. Andrew was just delighted to get to play on his beloved swings and slide again! Pictures of the baby shower and the park fun are in the gallery.

The rest of the week has been an utter blur, but today Joe and I took Andrew to the Vilas Park Zoo for the first time since last October. We met up with my co-worker Vicki and her son Alex as well as Budgie and Wyatt, along with their dad's, Benson and Steve. Andrew loved the rhinos, we got to hear the lions roar, and I was happy to see some active polar bears. Pictures of our time at the zoo are in the (spring!) gallery.

**A day at the farm (2007-03-25 13:04)**



March 25: The weather today is stunning! The temperature is in the 70s. Wow. Yesterday we pulled out bikes out of storage, got them ready for the new year, and took a little trip down to a playground. I put away all my snowmen and winter decorations, and now bunnies and eggs fill our home.

This morning we went to the Pancake House for breakfast. Andrew loved his blueberry pancakes. He also ate most of my sausage patty:)

We took advantage of the lovely weather today by taking a trip to the A-Z Farm just outside of Madison. Andrew has been on the somewhat fussy/unhappy side recently, and I wouldn't say that he had a terrific time at the farm. It was packed, and he was very overwhelmed. Sometimes he wanted to get down, but as soon as he was on his own, he would start sobbing. I took lots of pictures and video, and I imagine that we'll spend a lot of time in the next week reviewing all the animals we saw in the safety of our own home. One perk of our visit was seeing my friend Lucy and her daughter Isobel while we admired the sheep. Pictures of all the adorable animals and of a worried Andrew are in the gallery. What a great way to spend some time. I LOVE the farm!



**It's a rainy day (2007-03-31 20:31)**



March 31: We had a really quiet Saturday today, which was a nice thing. Yesterday Andrew and I visited Olbrich and saw the conservatory in its newly pruned loveliness. Andrew has the best time running around, looking at the fish, pointing out the water falls, and navigating the stairs.

I was hoping a bit for sunny, warm weather so we could work on some new garden beds, go biking, and in general play outside. Mother Nature had other plans in mind, though, and a soft rain has been falling off and on since morning. So we hung out around the house. Andrew helped me set up a new composting bin that I finally acquired, and he got to wear his new froggie rubber boots for a quick romp around the yard between showers. April is here tomorrow, and it really feels like spring. Speaking of April, this will be our first April without our pooch April. It's been 10 months since we put her down. I was thinking about her with all the storms tonight. Sweet doggie. We sure had fun having her in our family.

Pictures of Andrew playing in the back yard are in the gallery.

### 3.4 April

Easter in Kansas (2007-04-09 13:26)



April 9: We're back home after a really nice visit with our family in Wichita. We flew out on Friday and returned today (Monday). It was such fun to see Bryan's parents, Melanie and Ben, and all four of Bryan's grandparents. We even got to see Ben's family as his brother's quadruplets were celebrating their third birthday and we were invited to join the party.

Andrew had loads of fun finding the Easter eggs that his granny filled with fun treats, and we all enjoyed munching on the frosted Easter cookies she made. I wish we could see all the Dotzours/Harveys/Davis more frequently, but we sure do have a great time when we are together!

Extensive pictures of our visit are in the gallery.



## Exploring the floor (2007-04-12 06:34)

April 12: Andrew has discovered a new approach to being unhappy: throwing himself on the floor. Sometimes he isn't even unhappy...he's just done being vertical. While we were traveling over the weekend, he would regularly stop walking and drop to the ground, spread eagle. Staring up at the ceiling, he would then begin inching his feet in a circle. Bryan or I would stand nearby to make sure he wasn't going to trip up a fellow traveler or be run over by a beeping airport car. At one point, he rolled over onto his belly and began crawling down the hall. This seemed to amuse some tired travelers.

We've found that picking him up usually results in an unhappy boy, so if at all possible, we let him spend his quality time with the floor.

Oh, sweet spring! (2007-04-22 18:11)



April 22: It seems hard to believe that my last post was ten days ago. I was working really hard on a grant application for work from the moment we returned from Wichita until last weekend. Then I've spent the last seven days riding the crest of new spring activity. I'm finishing up a four day weekend. Today was an amazingly beautiful Earth Day, and we spent nearly all of the last three days outdoors. Andrew's not so into napping these past days, but other than that, our time together has been great fun.

I took off Thursday and in a fit of self-possession, I sent Andrew to daycare and spent the day doing my own thing. I cleaned and gardened and went to the library, and ate ice cream outdoors in the sunshine while reading a book. It was delightful. We dug up a flower bed in front of our house, and I supplemented the soil. Pictures of the new garden are in the gallery. On Saturday, we went to Madison's first farmer's market of the season, and we got cheese curds, tomato plants, and several perennials for our garden. This afternoon, I planted peas and radish and two tomato plants. Andrew helped drop the peas into the soil. However, after we covered them, he really wanted to "dig, dig!" them up again:)

Today we went to the zoo, and the little guy did not want to walk. Silly boy. So we ended up carrying him all around

the zoo. It was packed with people and kids getting outdoors to enjoy this amazing weather. We saw our neighborhood owl a couple times this past weekend. There's speculation about which tree holds its nest and whether there are chicks. Loads of pictures are in the gallery!

### **Budding imagination (2007-04-22 19:18)**

April 22: Andrew's ability to put words together is growing dramatically, and he's really starting to amaze us with his ability to recall things that we did and to tell us about how he feels and what he thinks. He is also doing just adorable make-believe games with his toys. His favorite is to put his toys in a pile and put them to "seep" with "bankies" and sometimes his "pacie." He has his animals eat and drink and sleep, climb mountains (a big person) and the other day, they were dancing.

When we play outside, he likes to go to the side fence, look into the neighbor's yard, and tell us about all the animals he sees. The pandas may be sleeping (shhhh), the tiger is hiding, the monkeys are eating, oh, and Bruno the dog is there too. When we were walking in the arb last week, Andrew suddenly stopped and very slowly turned to me to tell me that there were rhinos. They were sleeping, so we tiptoed by. I am continually stunned at the way he can suddenly share all this wonder with us. I find myself thinking, "Where does he come up with all this!"

### **Mom's latest cat scan was clear! (2007-04-25 14:27)**

April 25: What good news! I haven't posted updates on my mom's pancreatic cancer lately...mostly because there hasn't been much news to report. Since her surgery at Mayo in January 2006, she has been cancer-free. She did follow-up chemotherapy treatments and a clinical trial for a cancer vaccine at Northwestern University last summer. Her cat scan in January did not show any cancer, and now the scan she had today also did not show any cancer. What a relief!! Mom is scheduled to have quarterly cat scans and appointments with her oncologist (they also check-up on her at Northwestern), so the next one will probably be in July. That means that we can all returned to our favorite state of blissful denial that anything was ever wrong with our sweet mommy. Thank heavens:)

**Climbing boy (2007-04-29 07:19)**



April 29: Andrew is really getting the hang of climbing ladders and jungle gyms! See a video [here](#).

New photos of Vicki, Alex, Andrew, and me at the arboretum and of Andrew playing at Tenney Park are in the gallery.

### 3.5 May

Owl Sagas (2007-05-01 20:17)



May 1: I think I mentioned several weeks ago how much we have been enjoying hearing our neighborhood owls hooting in the evening. There was quite a bit of speculation about the presence of chicks, and last week, we all go to see them for ourselves. Three chicks tumbled about forty feet from their nest in a pine tree across the street from our house. Two of the chicks, fuzzy puffballs on the wet, green grass, seemed to be feisty and healthy. In the wild, owls that fall out of the nest are taken care of on the ground. But in a neighborhood, an exposed owlet doesn't have much of a chance. We called over to animal control, and they picked up the chicks with a promise that they would bring them back when it wasn't raining and try to return them to their nest.

On Friday evening, Hooter and Howie as they were dubbed returned along with a new basket/nest. Howie suffered a concussion and perhaps other injuries from his fall, so they are going to raise him in captivity. Hooter, however, got hoisted back into the pine tree, while one of his parents looked on. Tonight we could see one of the parents sitting in the basket along with the baby. What a neat experience this has been! Pictures of the saga taken by Nancy are in the gallery.



## Brrrito (2007-05-12 18:59)

May 12: For the last six months, Andrew's leaving-the-tub routine involves Bryan or myself making up a baby burrito to wrap Andrew in. In the last week, we've stopped doing bath time burritos, so I wanted to record that routine for posterity since it was such a constant in our lives.

It all starts with the towel (the tortilla). As bath time wraps up, Andrew would announce (rolling his "r"s) "Brrrito!" Brandishing the towel, one of us would lay it down on the floor and ask Andrew what should go on this burrito. Andrew has a pretty standard ingredient list. Once upon a time, prompted by us, he put beans, cheese, onions, or sour cream on the tortilla. The final ingredient is always a baby. That's why it is a baby burrito.

These days, he's gotten much simpler and more bizarre. Andrew always requests beans. And usually rice. And onions. Then more beans and more onions. More onions. More onions. More onions. "Andrew, we're out of onions...what else?" "Oranges!" "Oranges? That's a funny thing to go on a burrito, oh well, oranges it is. What else?" "Onions!" "We're out of onions, honey, what else?" "Beans!" "OK, beans on the burrito. What else." "Beans!" "OK, beans. What else goes on the baby burrito?" "Beans!" "Out of beans, hon. What else?" "BABY!" "Excellent, my favorite part! A baby goes in the burrito. Wrap him up tight. Mmmm good. Who wants a delicious baby burrito?"

Recently, other strange toppings include milk, lots of oranges (including an orange on top), burger, butter, and water. The game was getting excessively long, and Andrew often didn't want Mommy to do it. "Daddy do it. DADDY DO IT!" So I have started holding out the towel and asking him to be a horse and jump into the towel. How quickly the burrito has been forgotten. Tonight when he was done with his tubby time, he said "Horsey, towel. Jump."



You give me fever (2007-05-12 19:10)



May 12: Andrew was a sick boy today. Even with a good dose of medicine, his fever was in the 102-104 range. He was so sleepy and cuddly, and HOT. Several times today, he fell asleep in my arms. I am very thankful today for DVDs. Back in January when he was sick, and then again today, I've found that there is no better way to get through some tough hours. When I tried to read to him, he would find a reason to sob (I turned the page wrong, I picked up a bad book, I asked him what the animal says). He watched Animals are Beautiful People and both Fantasia movies. When his medicine kicked in, he would come over and ask to read. I felt like watching his shows let his mind tune out and helped him feel maybe a little less miserable. If only there were numbing treatments like that for life's larger crises. "Wake me when it's over," one could say.

Before supper, Andrew and I took a stroller ride, and he was clearly feeling a lot better. I'm hoping he wakes up in the morning feeling more like himself. And I'm also hoping that Bryan and I don't come down with it! It doesn't look like much fun!

**Rhubarb pie and a pouty bottom lip (2007-05-12 19:51)**



May 12: I never got around to posting last weekend, but I wanted to share the story of Andrew helping me to make a rhubarb pie. We were out in the yard, and I decided to pick some rhubarb. Andrew was quite a sight as he purposely tromped back to the house, holding two big, leafy rhubarb stalks in each hand. He loves to help, and he was a good helper as I chopped up the rhubarb. I gave him some pieces of rhubarb dipped in sugar, and he gobbled them up. Then he started pulling handfuls of raw rhubarb and eating them too. He helped me stir up the pie mixture, and he nearly ate the pie crust by diving into it, mouth open. I had to feed him niblets to keep him from taking a handful out of the middle of the topped pie. He seemed to enjoy the cooked version (along with Michael's custard) as much as he liked helping to make it.

You might also enjoy seeing a picture of Andrew's pouting lip. He has begun folding his bottom lip out whenever he is unhappy, and it's so cute, it's hard not to smile.

Pictures from the last couple weeks are in the gallery.

**Twinkle twinkle (2007-05-15 07:34)**

May 15: I just had to share a song that Andrew has been singing. He is starting to modulate his voice, so he actually sort of sings the song,

"Twinkle, twinkle little star. I would like; chocolate cake."

Not sure where he came up with it, but it cracks me up. Note: Andrew has never eaten chocolate cake.

Also, last night, Bryan and I were curious about how many animals Andrew can identify, so I sat down and counted, and I came up with about 75. The boy loves his animals. It makes me so proud.

Uncle Bubba (Michael) put up a fun post on his blog about spending mother's day with Andrew, my mom, and me.

On Thursday, we're off to Bayfield!

### **Mama is out of favor (2007-05-21 20:41)**



May 21: I missed posting on Mother's Day by about a week, but I do have some pictures from that general time period in the gallery. It's interesting that this holiday is coinciding with another very Daddy oriented time for Andrew. Back in January and February, he really wanted very little to do with me. It was as if Daddy were the sun in his world. For the last few months, I've been back in the loving, good graces of our young son, but these past few weeks, my suit seems to have fallen out of favor. He'll let me play with him and give him baths, but for example, this evening, he

suddenly needed his Daddy. I mentioned that Dad was in the back yard. So Andrew stood at the screen door yelling, "Daddy, DADDY. Where ARE you? WHERE ARE YOU?" Sweet boy loves his dad. And I love them both:)

#### **Vacation in Bayfield, Wisconsin (2007-05-21 20:49)**



May 21: Bryan, Andrew, and I just got back from a great family vacation to Bayfield, a fun little town at the very tippy top of Wisconsin, right on Lake Superior. Gathering Waters hosts an annual retreat for the staff of Wisconsin's 50 land trusts. Last year, we went to Door County (see last year's post), and this year, it was Bayfield. The drive was long (about 7 hours including some stops), but Andrew did really well. We got a little beautiful outdoor time in before a cold front blew into town and removed some of our recreating plans.

Pictures of apple orchards and a cute little boy running here and there are in the gallery.



Mayish happenings (2007-05-28 11:53)



May 28: Andrew won't nap. He's been in his bed for about 15 minutes, shouting, "Daddy, WHERE ARE YOU?" It's a little wearing on us all. Poor bubby needs to take a nap! We had a fun morning, though. We biked down to the Monona Memorial Day parade where we saw politicians and beauty queens and clowns and fire trucks, and (Andrew's favorite) a person dressed up like a moose. Then we biked into Monona and played at an amazing community-built playground. Andrew had great fun in the sand box (I think it was his first sand box experience). On the bike ride home, he fell asleep for the last couple blocks, so I think that made nap time the torture that it is. Now he is singing, "Bah bah black sheep..." At least he's not super sad. Sometimes he says, "Daddy, come play!" Not really what you want your napping child to be thinking:)

I have a couple of new albums up in the gallery. One is of a party we had with our neighbors last Wednesday night, and the other is of random moments from the last week including a field trip out to a beautiful piece of land in southwestern Wisconsin on Friday. I can't believe May has come and gone! We got the rest of our vegetable garden planted yesterday, and we cleaned out a little weed patch next to the garage and planted cosmos and Rudbeckia seeds. It was a perfect day.

And now, on to June!

### Phase III of website retrieval - CHECK! (2007-05-28 12:19)

May 28: While Bryan and I watched the start of season two of the TV show *The 4400* last night, I was able to upload the bulk of the missing photo albums to the gallery. All the data that was on this website prior to the crash of 2006 has been restored (see here for the back story). You can now look back at all baby Andrew's pictures from 2005 and 2006 including the ones that were previously missing. Any interruption in website access that you may have noticed the last day or so was due to the picture restoration process. My next (and hopefully final) step will be to go back to all the entries from 2005 and re-connect them to the appropriate gallery albums. Stay tuned!

### Carpe Diem - year two! (2007-05-28 12:34)



May 28: Yesterday was a perfect day. It started with Andrew sleeping until nearly 8 am. Andrew normally wakes up at 6:15, and I think he has slept past 7:15 a handful of times in his life. That meant that I got to read *Cricket* in bed (one of my favorite activities ever) for 45 blissful minutes. When Andrew woke up, he was as sunny as the day, and the two of us made hash browns as a breakfast surprise for Daddy. After our slow and cheerful morning, we headed outdoors to plant the rest of our vegetable garden (summer squash, butternut squash, cucumbers, herbs, and beets in addition to the tomatoes and peas we planted last month). We weeded and gardened, and Andrew did a great job helping us dig and water the plants.

After Andrew's nap, we headed over to Michael's house for a Memorial Day bash. This time two years ago, mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and we are all so happy and relieved beyond belief to be able to celebrate this



milestone together. Last year we had a Carpe Diem party for mom (see pictures here). Next year on this weekend, Marettta and Kyle will be getting married!  
Michael and his two roommates, Lisa and Alice, each got a kitten in the last couple weeks. Alice has Portia, Lisa has Small Horse, and Michael has Xaxxon. Pictures of the party and of the sweet kitties are in the gallery. Carpe Diem!

## 3.6 June

### Website retrieval - the final chapter (2007-06-01 21:24)

June 1: I'm happy to report that all the albums and story links from 2005 have been fixed and are now working. I had a lot of fun going back through all my posts from two years ago. What an amazing time that was! The back-story on the website fix can be found [here](#).

## Parties and parades (2007-06-01 21:46)



June 1: We had a great time tonight at a birthday party for one of the little girls with whom Andrew goes to day care. Sonora turned three, and it was so fun to watch Andrew's little friends all playing together. The evening was a little bittersweet, though, because both Elyse and Sonora are leaving Karen's day care this week. They are both moving on to preschools, but that leaves Andrew and Peri as the two big kids. How does time move so fast!?! Pictures of Sonora's birthday party are in the gallery. Elyse gave Andrew a note that she had dictated that said:

Andrew,  
I like your curly hair. I love you Andrew. I am going to miss you.  
Elyse

A few other pictures of the Memorial Day parade and a trip to the zoo are in the gallery.

## New baby on the way? (2007-06-06 08:19)

June 6: I'm not going to publish this until we make our news public, but it appears that Andrew may be a big brother! I took a pregnancy test on Thursday, and it came back negative. However, when I tried it again on Sunday, June 3,

there it was. A faint blue plus on the pregnancy test. In a stunned state, I said, "Oh my god!" Andrew then jumped around on the bed proclaiming, "Oh, my god! Oh, my god!" Good thing I hadn't exclaimed anything more colorful!

The rest of our day was a great one. We went on a trip out to Blue Mounds/Cave of the Mounds, to Mount Horeb (where I poked around in a bookstore for books on siblings and having a second child), and then over to the Mustard Museum. I've been a little surprised how this new development has created within me a new, fierce wave of love and devotion for Andrew. I find myself even more tender and loving toward him, and I think he's just the best little person around.

Starting a new pregnancy is really different this time. I still have feelings of disbelief and shock and find myself saying things to Bryan like, "apparently we're going to have a new baby. ha!" It just seems so odd that everything feels just the same as it was last week, but a little plus on some random stick that I bought at Walgreens foretells some major changes on the way. This time, however, I have seen and felt first hand how a pregnancy progresses. If it's at all like last time, I'll have zero symptoms until late July.

According to my calculations, the baby's due date is February 3 or Feb. 8 (depending on how I calculated it). That's just not too far away! At this point, I think we're going to wait until we're close to 12 weeks before sharing out news. I just made my first appointment with my doctor for July 3 Now that I've gotten used to the idea for a few days, I sort of want to start telling people. But last time, I really enjoyed (especially in retrospect) having that period when it was just a secret between me and Bryan. A wonderful little secret.

Amidst my flood of thoughts, I have several fears. What if this pregnancy terminates? It happens a lot of the time. How do I tell Heather about this? She so wants a baby... Then there are more practical concerns. We were supposed to go skiing with Bryan's family in February. Gosh darn it! I don't think that will happen! I wonder if we should tell them earlier so they can change plans. And then there's my concern about February in general. That's a cold, illness-prone month for a baby to be born. I don't think I'll get out walking much like I could with Andrew. Oh well!

I've also started sending out feelers to the baby. I feel like a mama whale singing down into the deep waters for her little one. "Hello! Is anyone there?" I felt Andrew's presence so strongly while he lived inside of me. It took a while, though. I mean, at this point, the baby is just mostly a bundle of cells. Maybe by late this summer, I'll start to get a sense for who this new little person is. It feels good to open up my heart to the new little wonder growing in my belly. There's a channel of love and contentment that's started flowing from me to the wee one. Now, no bigger than a sesame seed, I hope it already feels loved.

So that's my update. Big news! Big changes! What a wonderful time.

Althea

**Caves and local produce (2007-06-09 20:54)**



June 9: It's been a good week. My work has been really hectic recently, but coming home in the evening to hang out with Bryan and Andrew is lovely. Last weekend, we had plans to go camping, but they fell through due to rainy weather. So instead we tried to go hiking out at Blue Mounds on Sunday. As we arrived, the skies opened up with rain, so we had a change of plans and decided to head underground. The Cave of the Mounds was a fun outing. Andrew did really well in the cave. In the last week, we've also gone biking around Lake Monona with Andrew a couple times. Pictures of our caving experience, of Andrew picking radishes from our garden, and of us biking are in the gallery. Our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share also started this week. We're so excited to get produce straight from a local farm every-other week for the summer. For more information on our great CSA, see the Vermont Valley Community Farm's website.

**The Bambino Babies are Two! (2007-06-09 21:20)**



June 9: We had a party for our Happy Bambino group at Tenney Park Beach tonight. As always, it was wonderful to get to see all the parents and to marvel at how amazing and adorable all the little ones are. Their birthdays range between mid-May and late-June, so this was a birthday-partyish beach party for them all. Pictures from the evening of lots of adorable kids are in the gallery. For a comparison, see the pictures from the winter party, and their 1 year birthday.

Andrew had a wonderful time playing in the water and with the sand. It was his first time at a beach, and I think we'll be heading back again soon. We all shared a delicious potluck dinner and fed the little ones cupcakes. Andrew had his first bite of chocolate cake, and it appears that he was quite happy and would like to eat it much, much more often.



June days (2007-06-23 14:30)



June 23: I can't believe that it's been two weeks since I last posted. I guess that being out of town for five days makes that more likely:) We have been really enjoying the weather and the flowers and the outdoor activities these last weeks. I went to Washington DC for a fun/work week, and Bryan and Andrew held down the fort here in Madison quite well while I was away. I put together Andrew's second year album, and it was a lot of fun to look back through all the changes that have happened over the last year.

We got a troubling phone call recently from my mom's sister, Aunt Kate (also known as Dear Sweet Great Aunt Kate or DSGAK). Her husband, my Uncle Greg had kidney cancer several years back. Just last week a scan discovered a new growth in his lung. They are looking into treatment options, and they are close in out thoughts these days.

While I was in Washington DC, I got to spend a couple days with my dear friend from high school, Kacy (now Kate). She, her partner Rueteger, and I enjoyed eating some delicious meals, hiking at Great Falls, and having lots of time to catch up. While I was in DC, I also got to have lunch with Grace and Lara...friends from graduate school. For dinner on Monday night, I was able to see my good friend from Carleton, Andy, and his wife Anne Marie, and their little kids, two-year-old Kasha and one-month-old Ciaran.

On Tuesday, I headed up to the Hill and met with five of Wisconsin's representatives. Afterwards, I headed over the the capitol for a tour, and I was lucky enough to see a vote in the Senate. It was pretty cool to see a lot of the Senators including Clinton, Kerry, Lieberman, Obama, and Kohl, as they did their politicing. Earlier in the morning, I walked within a couple feet of Hilary Clinton. It was pretty cool!

Pictures from these days are in the gallery.



**Happy Birthday to Andrew! (2007-06-23 14:43)**



June 23: Andrew has been going around all day singing, "Happy Birthday to Andrew!" Yesterday we went to Olbrich gardens with Vicki and Alex and a couple of their friends. Andrew had great fun trying to throw rocks into the pools (not allowed) and running up and down the paths (very encouraged). Afterwards, we went to Michael's Custard for a yummy lunch. Granny Lu and Grandad arrived in town in the afternoon, and we had fun planning for Saturday's party and playing together. Dinner at Ella's Deli ended our fun day together.

This morning, we had Andrew's second birthday party at the zoo. Andrew had nearly his entire immediate family gather together to celebrate. After a romp through the zoo, we had a picnic and a Noah's Ark shaped cake. Loads of pictures are in the gallery.

### 3.7 July

June flew by! (2007-07-08 13:14)



July 8: Here it is, the end of the first week in July, and looking back at my web posts from the last month, I realize that there is only four. Seems like we've been jumping from one major activity to the next all month long. What a nice month June was! We had fun with friends, I got to go to DC for work and a visit with Kacy, Andrew turned two amidst the loving support of his family and friends, and I turned 30! I have pictures in the gallery from the last week in June. They include some quiet time we spent with Granny Lu, Grandad, Ben, and Melanie, pictures from a photo shoot of kids we did at Indian Lake for Gathering Waters, and a few pictures from my birthday party on June 29. I have a table filled with wonderful birthday cards from my friends, and it makes me so happy to think of how lucky I am to have my life filled with such supportive, loving, and positive people.

## Two-year-olds in DC (2007-07-08 13:33)



July 8: We just got back this afternoon from a wonderful five day visit to visit our friends Grace and Tim and their son John in Washington DC. It was so relaxing and so much fun to hang out and enjoy summer days while watching our little boys play and explore. I'm John's godmother, and you can find pictures from our past recent visits in the gallery (October 2005), (July 2006). Amazing how much these little guys have changed!

We arrived on the 4th, and Andrew and John did a good job of negotiating their own set of rules and procedures about how they played together. John is an amazingly verbal little boy. Bryan and I were pretty stunned at how much he can carry on conversations. The rest of the week we did pre-nap field trips. Thursday we went to the National Zoo to see the elephants, pandas, and hippos. Friday we took a bike ride through a beautiful forest to a playground near a creek where the boys had a blast splashing and throwing rocks while wearing their green froggie boots. Saturday we took another bike ride to a different park where the boys climbed and slid and ran and had a great time. Our friend Lara from graduate school lives in DC, and she watched the boys on Friday night while the four parents went out to indulge in a wonderful dinner at the Black Market Bistro. I highly recommend it to anyone living in or visiting the DC area. On Saturday night, Lara came over for a yummy supper cooked by Grace and Tim, and afterwards, Lara made crepes and we enjoyed a late-night dessert of warm crepes, cold ice cream and Nirvana Chocolate Spread (Nutella only better).

The flights to and from DC went really well, Andrew and John did a great job of getting along and even sharing, and I think we're all feeling happy and rested and full of fun memories.



## How we've passed our July days (2007-07-29 10:49)



July 29: It feels rather unfamiliar for me to be sitting down with my laptop to do a web posting. Our days have been packed full this month, and I've spent almost no time online. Our Netflix movies are from June... Summer is a good time to unplug. I thought I'd give a little update, though about what we've been doing with our days. Since my last post twenty one days ago, we've had lots of activities going on. Bryan had his wisdom teeth pulled earlier this month. His wisdom seems to be intact, and he even went back to work the same day.

Andrew's day care provider, Karen, went on vacation from July 11-19. Fortunately, Bryan's mom came to our rescue by flying up here to Madison to watch Andrew for a week. She and Andrew had some great times together playing with homemade play dough, going to the park, building towers, and spending a lot of nice time together. LuAnn is so great, and it was just fabulous to have a three-adults-to-one-child ratio in the house. I think back fondly on that week...

Bryan has been on a sand volleyball team this summer. They've been playing every Tuesday night, and Bryan really has enjoyed it. Hard to believe summer activities like that are more than half-over! While Bryan's mom was here, Bryan and I went to a local baseball game hosted by Widen (Bryan's work). It was a lot of fun to spend an evening watching the Mallards play ball, hanging out with friends, and enjoying a summer evening together.

I've had a couple travels for work. Last week, our summer board meeting was up in Minocqua, and while I just drove up for the day, it was lovely to spend a few hours up north. What a wonderful part of the state! On Tuesday and Wednesday this week, my Gathering Waters office had a summer retreat at Jack's house down on the Wisconsin River. We camped and ate good food and jumped in the river to cool off, met for business for a while, but generally had a fun time together.

We head back to Jack's with my family this weekend, and I'm looking forward to that. We're planning on attending the neighborhood summer picnic this afternoon. These summer days sure are full!

Pictures from the last three weeks are in the gallery.

## **Mom's health update for June and July 2007 (2007-07-29 11:03)**

July 29: I've been holding off on posting anything about my Mom's health for the last month because, while she has been having health complications, it hasn't been clear what was going on, and she didn't want to get people worried while we were waiting to find out answers from her wide team of health experts. At this point, though, it is looking very likely that Mom's cancer has returned.

Here's the back story.

I haven't posted about Mom's health in many months because there hasn't been much to say. Here's a link to past posts I've done on Mom's health. She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in May 2005. She then did chemo and chemoradiation throughout the summer with the hope of shrinking the tumor so it could be removed. We met with several surgeons in the fall of 2005 who said they could not operate, but when Mom met with Dr. Farnell at Mayo clinic in December, he said he could operate.

Mom had the major Whipple Procedure done on January 11, 2006 to remove the tumor, most of her pancreas, and sections of intestine and stomach. The surgery was very successful with the one blemish being that there was a positive margin on the Superior Mesenteric Vein. That means that some tumor cells were left in Mom's body, and given the fierceness with which they regrow, it made her more susceptible for recurrence. We were told that follow-up chemotherapy would help prevent it from coming back.

Mom recovered well from the surgery. She underwent several weeks of follow-up chemo, and over the summer and fall of 2006, she took part in a clinical trial for an immunization to help a person's immune system fight off pancreatic cancer recurrence.

By fall 2006, Mom was feeling mostly back to normal...more easily fatigued, but generally good. In April 2007, she started back up at work 30 hours/week at American Girl. Every few months she has had a CT scan has happily showed no sign of recurrence.

Summer 2007

In late June, Mom's abdomen started filling up with fluid. By the end of June, she felt like she was eight months pregnant. She had a CT scan on June 28.

*On June 29*, we met with Dr. Frontiera, her oncologist. He said that she had a clot in the Portal Vein which drains the liver and spleen. The Portal Vein is formed by the superior mesenteric vein and splenic vein. Looking at the CT scan, he said that he saw a thickening or fullness in the vein, and said that the cause of the clot may or may not be tumor. Having a clot in the Portal Vein puts stress on the liver and causes fluid, called ascites, to weep from the liver. This fluid is what was causing Mom's abdomen to swell. Dr. Frontiera said that the main way of dealing with a clot in the Portal Vein is to put Mom on a blood thinner like Cumaden. Unfortunately, Mom has had two episodes of internal bleeding from taking very weak blood thinners, so putting her on a heavy-duty blood thinner carries with it some really serious risks. Dr. Frontiera drained Mom of almost eight liters of fluid (a big relief for her), and tested the fluid to see if it contained cancer cells.

*On July 3*, we met with Dr. Frontiera again. The results of the fluid (as well as repeat tests) showed suspicious cells, but did not confirm the presence of cancer. Frontiera said that we should regard this as a recurrence. He said that if she wanted to treat it, she could go on Gemzar weekly, but the problem is that response rates to Gemzar, the main pancreatic cancer chemo drug, are just depressingly low.

He said that in a best-case scenario, that the clot in the portal vein is being caused by scaring. He said that Mom come in to the clinic every few days to be drained, or she could have an external catheter so she could drain the fluid herself.

*On July 11*, we met with Dr. Matzke, Dean Care's pancreatic surgeon. He said (all doctors do) that he was really

impressed with how good Mom looks. I think in reading over her chart that they are expecting someone quite a bit sicker. Dr. Matzke said that he thought that the clot was the cancer coming back. He said that not finding confirmation of cancer in the drained fluid is not uncommon. My main thought at this time is, "Man, this guy is just really trying to burst my bubble of denial that this could be recurrence, isn't he!" Matzke thought that Mom should be on some type of blood thinner to try to free up the portal vein so her liver could drain properly, and was worried about how her liver will do longer-term as it is not able to drain except through some little veins that have developed to compensate for the clot.

We asked lots of questions about surgical options, and again, this nice, young doctor kept bursting our bubble. He told us that no one would try to remove a tumor in this vein or to try to reconstruct the vein. Matzke had worked for our magic Dr. Farnell at Mayo, and we asked him to give us a referral to see him. Matzke helped make that referral possible.

*Mid-July:* After going in to the clinic to get drained every few days, Mom decided to have a permanent catheter installed so she could drain the ascites herself. She has been draining one-to-two liters each day.

This was kind of a rough time. Mom was still working 30 hours per week, wasn't feeling very good, and was trying really hard to visit and help her mom in Janesville, deal with the fluid issue, and make doctors appointments. Her sick and vacation time at American Girl were down to just a few days, and poor Mom was more discouraged by this whole situation than I have often seen her. To complicate the situation further, about a week after getting the catheter installed, it started leaking. Actually, I think a better description is probably gushing. Mom would be on her way to work, she'd stand up to get out of the car, and she would find herself soaked. Dr. Frontiera tried several times to tighten up the stitches around the drain. He suggested she try bed rest and drain frequently to help keep the pressure down and help it heal. To our great displeasure, though, several weeks later, it is still leaking, flowing, whatever, and it's keeping mom housebound.

*July 25 - Trip to Mayo:* Mom, Dad, Maretta, Kyle, Maretta's friend Josh, and myself all met in Rochester, Minnesota to meet with the oncologist, Dr. Quevedo and with the surgeon Dr. Farnell. Given the difficulty of making a diagnosis from the CT scans, and given how few people are in Mom's situation, we wanted to talk with some of the world's experts before we made any decisions about how to proceed.

Mom's weight has dropped quite a bit the last couple weeks, and she was feeling pretty light headed, but again, the doctors were all impressed with how good she looks.

Dr. Quevedo was very compassionate and gave us a lot of his time. Unfortunately, his diagnosis was not what we wanted to hear. He said that it looks very much like the cancer is back. He did say that occasionally there is no cancer and that blood thinners can deal with a clot in the portal vein, but that it would be unprofessional of him to say that the cancer wasn't back. Quevedo said that he didn't know the right answer about using blood thinners. He said, "Do you cause harm by doing or not doing? We can't know." Quevedo talked about the pros and cons of going on a weekly infusion of Gemzar, and talked about the possibility of trying a Phase I clinical trial. Dr. Quevedo said that it's Mom's decision about which of these treatments she wants to try. When we pressed him about what he would do, he said that if it was his wife, he would suggest she do no treatments because he felt like the possible benefits of the treatments were outweighed by the side effects and the constant medical appointments. Again, nice doctors giving us information we didn't want to be hearing.

Dr. Quevedo was impressed with how calmly Mom was receiving all this information, the questions she was asking, and the fact that we were joking and occasionally laughing throughout these dire conversations. That's my mom!

Dr. Farnell didn't have good information for us either. He felt pretty certain that the portal vein is blocked by tumor. Above that, he had carefully reviewed Mom's CT scans and actually identified a few other places where he thinks he might be seeing tumor recurrence. One is called a Sister Joseph nodule, and it's located outside of the abdominal cavity a little above her belly button. The other two spots he showed us are thickenings (a grey fuzzy area on the CT) around the Superior Mesenteric Vein (the good old SMV) and the Common Iliac Artery. Farnell thought that the clot in the Portal Vein should be treated with blood thinners, because he was worried that the clot could propagate and cause complications.

Unfortunately, he took the rug out from under us by saying that surgery is just not an option. He suggested that we get a biopsy of the Sister Joseph nodule. He also took a look at Mom's catheter and said that drains often will leak when there is a buildup of fluid in the abdomen. He mentioned a "Denver Shunt" as the only other option for dealing



with the fluid (ascites) buildup, but didn't recommend it because of concerns of complications. So from our trip to Mayo, we learned the following:

- This problem really most likely is cancer recurrence. Hearing it from the doctors at Mayo made this seem a lot more real. I feel like I need to still say though, that despite what the doctors think, the clot could just be scarring.
- Surgery isn't an option. Not even at Mayo.
- We should get the Sister Joseph nodule biopsied. While we don't want to have proof that we're dealing with cancer again, we do want to know what we're dealing with.
- Using a blood thinner like Coumadin or Heparin has a lot of pros and cons. We may want to see a vascular specialist to help us make this decision.
- Going on Gemzar (aka Gemcitabine) for cancer recurrence has pros and cons. The pros aren't great. The cons aren't too bad either.
- Trying out a clinical trial is an option (there are about 27 listed right now). The purpose of a phase I is to determine dosage, so there's a good likelihood of getting sick. Also, there aren't any trials available now that look like cures. But this is an option if we want to do something.

Hey, that's a pretty depressing list. No wonder I've been feeling kind of down the last few days. Mom is home now, continuing to deal with the leaking issue, and we're all starting to try to figure out what all this means and where we go from here. If in reading through this, you have questions, please let me know.

We've gotten through the last couple years through a combination of a positive attitude, a blissful state of denial when things were going well, and generally just being very appreciative of each other. I hope that before too long, we can feel like we're all moving forward with this new situation together. For now, I'll borrow a line of Anne of Green Gables, "Isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day, with no mistakes in it yet."

## 3.8 August

### **Mom's making progress? (2007-08-01 10:28)**

August 1: I've been pretty wrapped up at work and with evening activities, so I've only talked to my mom on the phone the last few days. Not much to report, but I thought that folks might like an update none-the-less.

Mom said that the leaking catheter seems to have slowed somewhat. Yesterday (Tuesday), she went into the oncology clinic for a long time. She had an appointment with Dr. Frontiera, and he said that he had talked with Dr. Matzke about scheduling a biopsy of the suspected Sister Joseph's Nodule. It was Dr. Frontiera's opinion, though, that the suspected nodule was just an old umbilical hernia. Differing opinions can be hopeful! I don't think we have a date for the biopsy yet, but that's in the works.

Mom was at the oncology clinic for about six hours, getting two bags of saline infused through IV. She's been drinking loads of liquids, but so much of it is leaking out of her liver as ascites that her blood pressure is getting pretty low, and she's feeling fuzzy and tired, and generally dehydrated. Mom's brother Peter and his wife Marci came up from Iowa and visited Mom during her time at the clinic.

I talked to Mom briefly this morning, and she said that the leaking of catheter seemed to have maybe diminished, so that was hopeful. She was discouraged that after getting all that fluid yesterday that her blood pressure was still low (99), and she is still feeling really light-headed. Throughout the day today, she's been feeling really wiped out.

We're getting geared up for our annual trip out to Jack's house this weekend. Mom's thinking about the shopping list (we have 15 attendees this year!), and Joe and I are going to acquire the food.

That's about all I have to report today.

Althea

### **Adorable Andrewisms (2007-08-01 10:52)**

August 1: I've realized to my chagrin that this summer I haven't done a very thorough job of documenting some of the wonderfully sweet and enduring things that my sweet son says and does. So here's a stream-of-consciousness set of Andrewisms.

Last month, I started asking Andrew to tell me stories. To my great surprise, he really likes telling stories. Mostly just one, but he really gets into it. It goes like this.

Andrew: "Onceupontime there was...MONSTER."

Adult: "A monster? Wow! What did the monster do?"

Andrew: "White monster. Big. Ate a table."

That's pretty much the story:)

We have two big cherry tomato pants in our back yard. All early summer, Andrew desperately wanted to pick the green tomatoes. It was a compulsion. It was as if he couldn't help himself. Now that it's the height of summer, he can pick as many ripe tomatoes as he wants. But sometimes he still grabs the green ones. He calls them "tomataoes." "Go see tomataoes, Mommy!"

Another of Andrew's favorite games is to hide under the covers in our bed while a ferocious bear (his dad) sniffs around him and roars. Then Dad shouts, "Shoo bear!" The bear runs away, and Andrew pops out of the covers. Sometimes Andrew considers the fact that a bear is now loose in the house, and he yells, "Mommy, bear coming!" I then yell, "Shoo bear, get out!" and let Andrew know that it ran far away and we're all safe. He just loves this game. Daddy is a wonderful sport and plays it overandoverandover.

Favoritisms: Off and on for the last six months, Bryan has been the favored parent. When I'm alone with Andrew, we have a great time together, but if Daddy is home, there's a constant struggle for Andrew to let me do things like play with him or change his diaper or pick him up. Bryan is a super-amazing dad, and he fulfills his requested

duties well, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind a change in the young master's heart so he was a little less in the constant limelight!

Playing in the sprinkler: Andrew loves having me squirt him with the garden hose. For a little boy who so very much detests getting his face wet while having his hair washed, he loves getting sprinkled with the hose. He calls it "rainbow," I think because I would try to show him the rainbow in the water and that was when he first realized how fun it was to run through the water. He's such a cutie playing in the front yard as I try to water our dry, dry garden.

Speaking in sentences: Suddenly it seems, Andrew is moving from two-word phrases to much more complex sentences. The other morning, I brought his toy elephant into his room. He looked at the elephant and said, "Good morning, elephant. I am getting my diaper changed." Bryan and I exchanged shocked glances. When did he learn how to talk like that!

He's also started reciting books more. He'll often repeat a couple lines, but last night while he was taking his bath, he pretty much recited Freight Train to himself. "Moving. Going through tunnels. Going by cities. Crossing tressles. Moving in darkness, moving in daylight. Going, going (whispered) gone." It's amazing to watch him learn and do new things.

We were reading a book this morning about 10 little fish, and he pointed and counted the 10 fish (sometimes counting to 11) several times. He's been really into counting for a few months, but it's not until more recently that he's started pointing and counting the actual number instead of pointing at a group of objects and just saying numbers for a while. It's so weird to think that someday he'll be reading too!

**Summer = Weekend at Jack's (2007-08-05 19:42)**



August 5: I'm about to fall asleep, but I wanted to post the pictures I took during our weekend at Jack's house. We all had a wonderful time. Mom felt pretty good, and there was lots of laughing and eating and being outdoors together. The weather on Saturday was rainy (for the first time in what feels like a month) and chilly, so we postponed the Wisconsin River float until Sunday. Instead, we drove around some of the beautiful areas surrounding Jack's place, headed over to Iowa for a bit, and saw some beautiful views.

On Sunday, Michael, Matt, and Lisa had to head home early and so missed our float. Tremendous thunderstorms overnight kept Kyle awake, so he found a bed to catch up on sleep. But Terry, Jack, Tom, Josh (a friend of Michael's), Joe, Becky, Bryan, Andrew, and I had a fun time on the river. We took a canoe so we could get home fast if Andrew stopped having a good time. And it was cold, cold, cold, but the wonderful thing was that Andrew was just sparkling with delight the whole time. He thought that being in the water was so neat, he did NOT want to ride in the canoe, and so he had fun in the river with the rest of us. We stopped for our watermelon demolition mid-way, there was some watermelon attacks, and despite the lack of sunshine and chilly water, everyone had a really fun time. Photos of the weekend are in the gallery.

Rainy weather, but Mom's feeling better (2007-08-07 08:36)



August 7: Still not much to report, but I figured that an update on Mom's health may be appreciated. We all had a wonderful trip to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River last weekend. Mom masterminded the menu, created the shopping list, and then she directed some of the cooking, but in general, she didn't have to do much. It was a great little vacation.

To her great relief, the catheter Mom has in her belly to drain the fluid that's been building up in her abdomen has stopped leaking. So for the last four days, she can stand up and move around without the threat of getting suddenly drenched without warning. Thank goodness. We're still speaking about this quietly, though, and hoping it doesn't start up again.

The next step medically are to try to get a biopsy of the suspected Sister Joseph Nodule. Doctors are confering about this, and we should know in the next couple days whether they can get something scheduled.

We'd also really like to see if we can't get Mom's fluids stabilized. Her blood pressure has been low, she's been weak and tired, and losing quite a bit of weight. If we can't cure the situation causing those symptoms, we'd at least like to look at ways to treat them. Mom has been going in to the clinic every few days for infusions of saline, but that hasn't done much to help her. So I think we'll be looking at other treatments in the near future.

We all had a lot of fun spending the weekend together. When I talked to her yesterday, Mom was thinking about taking a solo trip out this week. It would be her first time out alone in several weeks.

So that's the news for now!

Althea

## **Mom's suspected Sister Joseph's Nodule is not Cancer (2007-08-11 07:06)**

August 11: I got a welcome phone call from my mom last night. The radiologist was finally able to compare four of Mom's cat scans from over the last year, and they determined that the area that was suspected as a Sister Joseph's Nodule has not changed or grown at all. That lead them to decide that it is not cancerous. What happy news!

After waiting for the last couple weeks to find out if Mom should have a biopsy of this nodule (which was just under the skin above her belly button), I'm relieved to have the doctor's opinion. Apparently, Mom's cat scans got sent to someone who was on vacation and then got stuck in transit, so that's why it took so long for them to review them.

A radiologist reviewed them last night, and Mom's oncologist called her at 8 pm to give her the results. This doesn't mean that the clot in Mom's portal vein isn't cancerous, but it is a good sign. Here's one thing I read about Sister Joseph's Nodules:

Umbilical metastasis is one of many characteristic signs of extensive neoplastic disease. It suggests advanced distant metastasis and is associated with poor prognosis.

So I'm happy to think that this isn't what we're dealing with!

Mom's brother, Kirk, is in town from Texas this week. He took Mom out to breakfast yesterday morning, so that was one of her first public outings in the past couple weeks. Her blood pressure continues to be very low, which means that when she walks around she feels really dizzy.

We're going to talk over the next couple days about whether to try a blood thinner or chemotherapy, and I think Mom will be interested in starting whichever treatments she decides next week.

That's the news for now!  
Althea



**Banana bread and "I love you" (2007-08-11 07:16)**



August 11: Just a quick update on some of Andrew's sweet activities. In the last few days, he's been saying, "I love you" much more than normal. When Bryan came home from work yesterday, he raced over to him, leapt into his arms, and said, "Oh Daddy, I LOVE you. I missed you!" And this morning, feeling full of happiness about our Saturday morning togetherness, he ran from me to Bryan, saying "I love you, Mommy." "I love you, Daddy." It's music to our ears:)

This morning, Andrew and I got up early and made a loaf of banana bread together. Andrew dumped all the ingredients in, he helped stir, and he even pulled apart the egg shell ("It fell in, Mommy. Slimy."). He also had fun tasting a lot of the batter ("I yike it, Mommy. Sugar. Yummy.") We've baked together quite a bit, but I think he's getting to a point where he really gets the process and enjoys knowing that we worked together to make our breakfast together.

Pictures of the last week are in the gallery.

**There's a heartbeat inside!** (2007-08-14 20:08)

August 14: I had my second prenatal appointment this afternoon, and I got to hear the wee one's heart beat. Click hear, and you can hear it too. Baby's hearts beat is about 150 times per minute. I'm fourteen weeks into the pregnancy, and so far, everything is going well:)

Here's the week 14 update from Babycenter.com

Welcome to your second trimester! This is a big milestone because it marks the end of a critical development period.

All the basic structures of your baby's body are formed now. Head to bottom, your baby is just 3 1/2 inches long — about the length of a lemon — and weighs about 1 1/2 ounces. She's starting to develop an ultrafine, downy covering of hair all over her body called lanugo.

Thanks to brain impulses, her little facial muscles are getting a workout as she squints, frowns, and grimaces. She can grasp now, too, and she may be able to suck her thumb.

Teaching us to say goodbye (2007-08-17 20:41)



Aug. 17: I don't feel this way very often, but I must say that for the most part, today pretty much sucked. A major exception was waking up and having Andrew tell me, "I missed you last night, Mommy. I really missed you."

Maretta came over early this morning to tell me that when Mom met with her doctor yesterday, he gave her a referral to hospice. This wasn't totally shocking to me, but it was certainly hard news to swallow. She also told me that Duncan, the family dog, was in a lot of pain and had yipped through the night and probably needed to be put down this morning. So we cried together for a while.

Andrew saw the tears on my cheeks and said, "Mommy is sad." Then he tried to wipe them away. What a wonderful boy.

So I took Andrew to Karen's for the day (I'm normally at home with him on Fridays). I made an appointment with the vet to have him put to sleep, and I headed over to Mom and Dad's house.

After spending a little while up in Mom's room, I came back downstairs to find that Duncan had died on his own, at the foot of the stairs, in the home he loves. Duncan was Joe and Mom's dog, and poor Joe...this is really too much for a person to have to deal with. We all cried over Duncan for quite a while, and Joe and Dad and Maretta went out

back to dig him a grave. Joe's girlfriend Becky came over and helped me in the house. It was just a sad, sad day. Duncan had been unable to walk up the stairs for the last few days, and we knew he wasn't doing well, but it wasn't clear that he was dying until last night. With Mom's health failing so much recently, it's really hard to be dealing with the death of our family pooch. I kept having the title of one of my books, *Animals as Teachers and Healers* running through my mind. And I found myself wondering if Duncan isn't helping us somehow. Teaching us, giving us an outlet and an opportunity to experience feelings about life ending. He was a good dog. And he made our family's life richer and fuller because he was a part of us. Some pictures of Duncan over the last 12 years are in the gallery.

### **Changing gears (2007-08-17 21:40)**

Aug. 17: I have a difficult post to write tonight, and part of the reason is that I'm really just not sure how to frame the situation with Mom's health right now. Another reason is that I know that I'm seeing the situation through my own particular perspective. But since the only way I can tell the story is as I see it, that's what I'm going to do.

Since we visited Mayo clinic three weeks ago, Mom's health hasn't improved at all. She's been very weak and extremely fatigued. While she went out a few times (including a little outing with Dad last Sunday for their 35th wedding anniversary), she has rarely left the house. A few days ago, Mom was in quite a bit of pain, was unable to sleep, and couldn't keep food down. Since then not only is she sleeping much more and is very groggy, but she has also become increasingly disconnected from the people or conversations going on around her. She answers questions, but she loses her train of thought pretty quickly. It's been a weird shift over the last week, and it's really disconcerting and hard for us kids to start to feel like Mom is somewhat just not there. I almost feel like she is becoming unzipped from her active mind and self.

I had talked to Mom on the phone but hadn't seen her since last Saturday, and it was pretty hard to see the condition Mom was in today. Dad and Joe took Mom to see her oncologist yesterday afternoon. Dr. Frontiera encouraged Mom to not hold off on taking anti-nausea and pain meds. While the one mass (the Sister Joseph's Nodule) was determined not to be cancer, they still strongly believe that the mass that is blocking the vein that drains the liver is metastatic pancreatic cancer. Further, they believe that the symptoms that Mom is experiencing are consistent with pancreatic cancer. And beyond treating the symptoms, there is really nothing they can do to help her. It really sucks.

Along with making sure Mom had the best medications for her current situation, Dr. Frontiera also gave Mom a referral for hospice.

I know that this probably seems like a pretty big jump from the situation we've been addressing the last couple months. I've been thinking of it as a changing of gears. We've looking into all possible treatment options. We've researched and asked and pushed, and the answer we are getting is just a sad, relatively unacceptable answer.

But even so, we have this reality in which we're living, and I think all of us want to address the situation with as much honesty and grace as possible. At least, that's what I tell myself.

So this afternoon, two nurses from hospice came over to our house and explained the many services they can offer. They talked about ways they can help keep Mom as comfortable as possible and support us all through this difficult time. We all sat in the living room, and Mom was awake and able to respond to all their questions.

After burying Duncan this afternoon (our dog died this morning too...see this post for more info), Dad and Joe

and I went out for dinner, leaving Mom home alone. When we came home, Mom was in the kitchen making pasta. I was really happy to see her up and making herself food and wanting to eat food. I would say that it is completely possible that Mom will improve in the upcoming days and have a much better set of days in the future. I just don't know that for sure, and at this point, I wanted to be really honest about the fact that we're talking about hoping she gets to be feeling better for a while rather than getting better altogether.

I hate to have to share this, and I'm sorry to be the bearer of such unwanted news. I'm sure that many people are going to be interested in getting in touch with Mom or knowing what they can do. Unfortunately, Mom's been so fatigued these past days, that visitors and phone calls are really pretty hard for her. She sat up and read the mail this afternoon, so letters are good, and we are planning to log into her email (margotbabler@gmail.com) and print or read her messages to her.

You can also contact me if you have questions or just would like to talk.

And so ends the day.

Althea

### **Expressions through poetry (2007-08-17 22:06)**

Aug. 17: I asked Mom today how she was feeling and if she was scared or if she had things she wanted to talk about. But conversing has been hard for her these last few days. So it was with a sense of awe and tremendous love in my heart that I listened as she said, "You know, there's a poem by Robert Lewis Stevenson..." And then she went on to recite the following poem with such simplicity and longing that it just broke my heart. But it also gave me a feeling of peace. So it's with a hope that you might experience the same that I share it with you.



Bed in Summer

In winter I get up at night  
And dress by yellow candle-light.  
In summer quite the other way,  
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see  
The birds still hopping on the tree,

Or hear the grown-up people's feet  
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,  
When all the sky is clear and blue,  
And I should like so much to play,  
To have to go to bed by day?

### **Templeton Day (2007-08-18 16:39)**

Aug. 18: No major news to report today... Bryan and Andrew and I came over to Mom's this morning. Mom has been feeling about the same as yesterday, but maybe a little better. She didn't have to take drugs until later this afternoon, so she's been more mentally present than the last couple days.

Mom's brother Peter and his wife Marci came over for a visit this afternoon along with Mom's mother (Mum). Peter and Marci live in Iowa and are up visiting Mum for the weekend. I don't think that Mum has seen Mom for well over a month, so it was nice that they could see each other.

Since their visit, Mom has been doing a lot of napping. Andrew took a shorter-than-normal nap, so this afternoon we decided to have him watch his first ever full-length animated movie...the Lion King. Surprisingly, he watched the entire movie. At the end, he surprised us even more by really wanting to watch it again. My mom said, "Why not, it's kind of a Templeton Day." Templeton was the rat in Charlotte's Web. He liked to go to the county fair and pig out all day. So our Templeton day has included watching both the Lion King and Aladdin. Andrew is turning into a pile of mush. Mom, Joe, Becky, Bryan, Andrew, and I are all hanging out. Becky's mom made us a big plate of lasagna, so that's about to come out of the oven. Mmmm. I love lasagna.

### **Holding steady (2007-08-19 19:30)**

Aug. 19: I'm going to make this a quick post since I'm really exhausted and Bryan has made it clear that I should get off the computer in the next five minutes and go to bed:)

I stopped by for a visit with Mom for a few hours this afternoon. Maretta was back home after being in Spring Green at American Players Theater for the past day or so. Mom seemed to be in a similar place as she was yesterday, which is alright, but certainly not good. She came to the table to eat a yummy lunch provided by Heather and Michael as they visited her from Michigan.

I feel like today was sort of a downer for me. Friday was terrible, Saturday was better, and today things are sinking in more. I'm feeling a little like waking up and exhausted to find ourselves in this same, very sad and discouraging place.

Maretta and Joe are both trying to decide what to do about returning to school this semester. Joe has intended to leave on Wednesday, but it's a terribly difficult decision to make. I have so much worry and concern and love for Joe and Maretta and Michael and my dad, and it's clear that as time goes on things may get harder rather than easier. Hard to know, but I just wish I could spare them all some of the hurt they are feeling.

Mom has a doctor's appointment scheduled tomorrow along with our first visit from the Hospice nurse. I am going



to take off work to spend the day with Mom.  
Oops...Bryan's coming to get me! Good night.

### **More conversations with doctors (2007-08-20 20:13)**

Aug. 20: Another end-of day update... I went into work at Gathering Waters for an hour this morning and then headed over to Mom's house for the day. She had a doctor's appointment at 11:30 with Dr. Allen, the doctor who did some of her past scopes when she had internal bleeding. We were hoping to get some advice from him on how to proceed with a couple treatment options. Mom slept pretty well last night. She took a shower this morning, but it wiped her out so completely, it was pretty hard for her to get ready for her appointment. We ended up calling her doctor instead and talking to him through speaker phone. He reiterated the sentiment that trying to lessen the block in Mom's portal vein with blood thinner is not a good idea. We talked more about the idea of trying a "Denver Shunt" to keep the fluid (the ascites) that builds up in her abdomen in her body instead of draining through the catheter she has in her belly. Dr. Allen felt that the main advantage of applying a Denver Shunt is that you don't lose so much albumin (protein) from the body. Mom's blood pressure was really low today...it's often very low...and a lack of albumin probably adds to her feeling dizzy and tipsy and less sharp. Dr. Allen put in an order for some blood tests that the hospice nurses can draw at home tomorrow. From there, they'll see if she is low on albumin, and if she is, she can get transfusions for that. Perhaps it will be a small help to her.

After that excitement, Mom was totally exhausted and crashed in her bed for a few hours. Joe, Maretta, and I talked for a while, and then Maretta and I went out and ran some errands. The kids are both in the midst of making really hard decisions about going back to school for the semester. Maretta is also struggling a lot about whether and how to change her wedding plans (currently scheduled for May 24). These are such tough choices, and it is so very hard to know what the best decisions are. They are both excellent students, and taking off a semester wouldn't stop either from graduating. There are some really serious pros and cons to either decision, and I wish I could make things easier for them.

Tomorrow morning we are meeting with some of Mom's new team of hospice nurses. Already I am so glad we can use their services. Instead of exhausting Mom beyond belief to go in to the lab to get her blood drawn, someone can come to our house and do it here. I also got a call tonight from Mom's dear friend Nancy from the Twin Cities. She called from the road...saying that she was on her way down to visit because she really needed to see Mom. While in general, Mom is really much too weak and tired for visitors, it feels good to see the strength of the bonds she has with people as they pulled tightly during this difficult time.

If you've emailed me in the last few days in response to all that is going on with Mom's health, thank you! I check my email regularly, and I've been reporting to Mom who I'm hearing from. However, I haven't gotten my act together to reply to any of the notes yet. All the notes feel like little hugs, and I've been getting a steady dose. Thank you.

**Meeting and visit (2007-08-21 20:35)**



Aug. 21: When I left Mom this afternoon, she was sitting on the couch, visiting with her friend Nancy, and pouring over knitting projects. Nancy and her daughter Katie came down from the Twin Cities to visit with Mom today. I think they had a really nice time being together, and Mom seemed as perky and able to connect and carry on conversations as I've seen her in the last several days. Katie is getting married in January, and they had fun talking about those wedding plans. Mom and Nancy met when I was about one. Katie and I are the same age, and so Mom and Nancy have been friends for nearly 30 years. Time flies when you're having fun:)

Photos of their visit and other pictures of Andrew and our family are in the gallery.

Earlier in the morning, Mom's Hospice nurse and social worker came over for an introductory visit. They seemed like very nice people, and the visit was good. They brought up a lot of pretty difficult topics, so the conversations weren't always easy ones. However, I feel lucky that we can get some guidance and support from them as we move forward.

I talked more with Joe and Maretta today about the big decisions they are making. Maretta is planning on returning to St. Paul next week for the fall semester. She's thinking a lot about her wedding. Mom has been really sad that her health is affecting Maretta's ability to have a completely happy, fairytale wedding. And it makes Maretta sad that Mom is sad about her wedding. Kind of a crazy circle... Maretta and I were discussing the idea of having a small ceremony in the next couple months followed by a reception/party at a later date. These are some hard choices to make...

Joe is really on the fence about returning to school for the semester. He's talked to his dean, and in looking at his major, he doesn't need to take classes this semester in order to graduate on time. But Bowdoin is a wonderful place, and a big part of him would like to be there. Joe's friends are coming into town tomorrow to pick him up to drive him to Maine. So he has some continued intense decision making to do in the next day.

I mention all this because as much as my mom needs everyone's support, I feel like the kids do too. So please keep

them in your thoughts.

No major appointments are scheduled for tomorrow. I'll keep an update:)

Althea

### **So much else is going on! (2007-08-22 19:36)**

Aug. 22: I was about to start a post updating everyone on my mom's health, but I felt like to do so, I needed to write about some of the other bits of life that are floating around at the same time.

It's been a full evening! I tried to coordinate a potluck party at the beach for a bunch of my Mama friends, but due to the massive storms that came through today, we switched locations to our house instead. It was a small group...just two families, but I can feel the house still buzzing with the energy from their visit. Three two-year-olds and two little babies create a lot of excitement:)

Around 8 pm, Joe stopped by with Becky and two of his friends from Bowdoin, Lindsey and Leah. After spending the last week doing some gut-wrenching flipping back and forth about whether or not to return to Bowdoin for the semester, Joe's decided to go. So he and Lindsey and Leah are driving out tomorrow afternoon. I think he feels really relieved to have made a decision, and this way, he can still come back home if he decides he wants to. I'm excited for him. Andrew will miss

his Uncle Joe, though. They sure are buddies.

Andrew has taken up a new game these days. He calls it "baby." It involves him "crying" and whining until we feed him, change his diaper, tuck him in, or give him a hug. Then he wants us to be the baby. He brings us apples and broccoli for food. He came up with this game all on his own...I think he got the idea from a book we got from the library called Baby Talk. What a silly and imaginative little boy!

### **Mom visited with Mary (2007-08-22 20:32)**

Aug 22: Seems like Mom had a pretty good day today. Seems like she's been pretty steady for the last four or five days. I stayed at work until around 1 pm today and came over to Mom's after that. This morning she had a visit from the priest at St. Peter's Church. Joe's friends arrived in Madison from their cross-country road trip and had a nice visit with Mom around lunch time. When I arrived, Mom was napping. But all afternoon, she was doing her old-fashioned napping where she interjects comments into the conversations going on around her during her naps. [It's been weird to see her sleep so soundly these past weeks that she isn't aware of what is going on in the room around her. Usually while she's napping you can ask her a question and get a quick response.]

Mom's dear childhood friend Mary Read drove up from Chicago for a visit with Mom today. Mary's daughter is getting married next Saturday, so they had a nice time talking through wedding details and admiring the flower girl's lovely dress. Mom took a nice, long nap mid-visit, and Mary joined her from the chair nearby. Meanwhile, I did a coarse sort of all the papers on the kitchen counter. Shuffling and organizing papers is one of the things I do best:) Mom requested a pizza from Roman Candle tonight. She got the saltiest pizza she could find, with feta cheese, caramelized onions, and Kalamata olives. Mom's been really into salty foods these days, and I think that she and I have eaten nearly a full, big jar of olives in the last several days.

Joe is leaving for college tomorrow afternoon, but I think that's the extent of the activity she has going on. Her

Hospice nurse is coming by on Friday for a weekly check-in. I'm hoping for a few more days as nice as the last ones have been.

That's the update from me!

Althea

### Joe left for college today (2007-08-23 19:13)



Aug. 23: Today was a really big day. Mom's friend Christy came down from Wausau for a visit this afternoon. Then around 4 pm, Joe and his friends Lindsey and Leah left for their trip back to Bowdoin. It was kind of hard to say goodbye, but they're off for a nice adventure.

Mom was alright today. She barely napped at all though the afternoon. Toward the end of the afternoon, she developed a "stitch" in her side that seemed to cause her quite a bit of discomfort. I'm hoping that the pain meds that she took just before I left will help her sleep well.


Pictures of the day are in the gallery.

To help me keep track of Mom's schedule while I'm at work and home, I put together an online calendar for her.



You're welcome to bookmark it too.

### **It's an avocado! (2007-08-24 18:38)**

 Aug. 24: The baby-on-the-way is growing in leaps and bounds. Last week, they told me it was 2.5 oz, and this week (week 16), it added a whole additional ounce. I've been feeling really good for the last month or so. Actually, my regular jeans fit me again. They didn't fit well starting at about week 8, but then a couple weeks back, I think that things moved up, so at least temporarily, I can wear my pants even with belts again. Not for long, I bet! My appetite has picked up, and I'm consuming lots of calories for this little one to grow on:)

Here's the update from BabyCenter.com

At 4 1/2 inches long (head to bottom) and 3 1/2 ounces, your baby is about the size of an avocado.

In the next three weeks, she'll go through a tremendous growth spurt, doubling her weight and adding inches to her length. The patterning of her scalp has begun, though her hair isn't recognizable yet. Although closed, her eyes are moving (slowly), and she's even started growing toenails. Her fingernails and toenails will continue to grow, so don't be surprised if she needs them trimmed soon after birth.

### **One week later... (2007-08-24 19:14)**

Aug. 24: We're now one week past last Friday-which-was-so-hard. Mom had a really quiet and sleep-filled day today. She was feeling better...the pain she was experiencing yesterday stopped in the evening, and she slept long and pretty well through the night.

I took Andrew into Karen's today and worked until around 11 am at Gathering Waters. Then I went over to Mom's in time for her 11:30 appointment with her Hospice nurse, Jenny. Hospice has already proven themselves a really valuable partner. Twice now, they have been able to do lab tests in our home that Mom would otherwise have had to go into the clinic for. Jenny will come by once or twice a week to check on Mom, to review her symptoms and make sure that we're using the best treatments, and to bring us things to make life easier. Her next visit is on Tuesday.

After her nurse left, Mom slept for a couple hours while I made a bunch of calls about health insurance. Mom was in good spirits, and she ate a pretty big lunch. She was also just really worn out, and I think that a quiet day with very little activity was just what the doctor ordered. I left to pick up Andrew at 3:45, and Mom had just headed up to bed for a longer rest. She wasn't taking any medications today, so it seems like she's feeling somewhat better.

Maretta's friend Laurie was in town today, so she had the chance to get out and spend the afternoon with her. Maretta has been doing just a wonderful job helping Mom, but I think she really needed a day away too. She will be in town for about another week before she plans to return to St. Kate's. We heard from Joe that he and his friends made it to New York to pick up Joe's roommate. They should be having a nice time together.

I may end up not seeing Mom tomorrow, depending on how things go. Could just take the day and spend it with my boys here at home. I hear that our rainy, rainy days are supposed to end in sunshine tomorrow. It would be fun to spend some time outdoors again.

If there is anything notable, I'll be sure to post it, but I may back off from daily posts in the upcoming days. Perhaps it's the little one growing in me, or maybe it's just that our days are so full, but I'm pretty tired in the evenings!

Feel free to email me if you have questions.

Althea

### **Down Days (2007-08-26 11:38)**

Aug. 26: Here's an update straight from Dennis Drive. Mom's sleeping on the couch, and Andrew is not sleeping from his crib up in Joe's room. Hmm. We'll have to see if we can't fix that. The little guy needs a nap!

I titled this post "down days" because Mom has been sleeping a tremendous amount the last few days. I think she might be taking a lesson from Liberty, the family cat, about good sleep habits. Sleep 22 hours, wake for two. Mom has had some perkier moments, but in general, even when she's awake, she's been pretty weary and hasn't been "clicking" mentally as well as normal. That's pretty frustrating for her.

She's doing alright. Taking lots of pain meds and sleeping lots. Not much to report beyond that. We're all concerned about her, but she's pretty comfortable, and I think we're doing everything that can be done to help her right now.

I continue to be paged from the young one upstairs. Signing off for now...

### **Tough times (2007-08-27 05:21)**

Aug. 27: 7 am. This sure isn't easy. I feel like with things with Mom's health that we've been kind of feeling our way along and getting through half-days, making Mom comfortable and tending to her needs. It makes it hard to see where we've been and where we're going. The last day or two, though, have been mostly unremarkable but overall pretty troubling and hard.

Mom's become slowly but increasingly confused and unresponsive and so very, very tired. Last night we called Hospice and spoke to a nurse because we were concerned about her confused mental state and about how little food she's eaten in the last day. The nurse was very kind but said that all the symptoms and signs that Mom is exhibiting are normal for someone in a declining state. She has medications for pain and for nausea and for anxiety, so that's mostly what they have for treatments for her right now.

I took Maretta home with me last night. The last week or so has really worn her ragged, and I worry that she has reach the limits of her ability to deal with Mom and the situation at home for at least a while.

At about 3 am, my dad called me at home because Mom had thrown up in bed. I came over to help him clean up, and a Hospice nurse came over around 4 am to check on Mom and to talk with us.

Mom is in tough shape, and for the moment, her approach to questioning reminds me a bit of Andrew..."No" to most questions...and that includes mostly queries about medicine or drink or blankets. She says she just wants to sleep.

At this point, Mom is sleeping in bed. Actually, in the baby monitor I have sitting next to me, I can hear both Mom and Dad breathing sleepily together.

Our social worker, Mary, and our RN, Jenny, are going to come over this morning...we should find out what time about 8:30 am. I'll post an update after our conversation with them.

Althea



### **Getting comfortable (2007-08-27 10:42)**

Aug. 27: 12:20 pm. Our Hospice nurses and social worker have recently left, and I finished making some initial phone calls, so now it's time for a web update. And the update is that we are going to hold tight.

The nurses and our social worker talked to us quite a bit about what has been going on over the last couple days. They also did an examination of my mom up in her room. At this time, they don't feel like she has any care needs that aren't being attended to here at home.

After last night's events, my dad is feeling really overwhelmed and like she needs greater, more 24 hour care than what we are able to provide here at home. Right now, though, Mom isn't interested in moving from the bed at all and declined several suggestions that we move her to the Hospice center.

At the moment, Dad and Terry and Michael have gone out to get some lunch, Mareta is holding down the fort at my house, her fiance, Kyle, is on the way down to see her from St. Paul, and Joe just arrived with his friends from their multi-thousand-mile-trip to Bowdoin. Mom has been sleeping for the last seven hours or so.

So we're in a bit of a holding pattern. We have someone from Hospice coming by early this afternoon to help Mom do some self-care. Then we have another nurse coming by this evening. Michael and Dad and I are going to figure out a way of doing shifts so that someone is able to respond to any of Mom's needs throughout the night while the rest of us get some rest.

The nurses seemed to think that in the next 24 hours or so we would be able to tell if Mom has hit a plateau of sorts or if she is going to experience more of a decline. In terms of care, the entire emphasis at this point is on keeping her comfortable and safe. Feels like it's been a big day already!

I'll continue to update as the situation moves forward.  
Althea

### **Not getting better (2007-08-27 16:55)**

Aug. 27: 7 pm. I'm feeling pretty ragged tonight. I think the effects of being up last night and a really full, hard day. I left Mom's house at about 1:30 to go home to nap. Mom had been sleeping and crying, but was generally very quiet from 5 am to 1 pm. In the afternoon, Dad napped in one of the kids' beds while Michael sat and kept watch over Mom. It was a good thing he was right there, because at one point she decided to stand up and was apparently unsteady enough that she probably would have fallen if he hadn't been there to steady her.

I called home at about 5:45 tonight, and the nurse was meeting with Dad and Michael. They went up and tended to Mom, and gave her some liquid oral medication to help deal with anxiety and confusion. We asked if we could have some too because we are anxious and confused. The nurse didn't seem to think that was a good idea.

I was on speaker phone for much of that visit. It sounds like Mom will be staying at home tonight, and we

may look at moving her to the Hospice center tomorrow. In a little bit, I expect to hear back from Dad and Michael to work out a schedule for watching over Mom through the night. That's the pretty low update for now...

Althea

### **Mom moved to the Hospice center (2007-08-28 05:23)**

Aug. 28: 7 am. It's been almost 18 hours since I was last personally tending to Mom. After going home at 1 pm yesterday to nap, I ended up staying home for the rest of the evening. I was on speaker phone while nurses were there a couple times. Throughout the afternoon, Mom was apparently sometimes very agitated and was trying to "get out." She also continued to be very resistant to any help or suggestions that she take food or water or medicine. It sounds like the late afternoon and evening were a really tough time for the care givers. Michael and Dad, Terry and Tom were there.

One thing we've talked about is how hard it is to have the dual role of care giver and relative. Dad hasn't had the space or time to allow himself to take in what is going on from the role of husband because he has been so consumed with caring for Mom's moment-to-moment needs. After declining (really everything but notably) the suggestion that we move Mom to the Hospice Center so Dad and Michael and I could have a needed break, Mom whispered to the nurse, "yes."

So around 8 or 9 last night, they brought an ambulance to our house, and they took Mom to the Hospice Center in Fitchburg. Michael said it went pretty smoothly. Poor Mom hasn't been too cooperative for the last day or so, so I was worried about the move, but it sounds like it went alright.

It seems to me like Mom is in a similar mental place as I was when I was in labor with Andrew. I retreated to what felt like a small, dark cave or tunnel where I felt like I was taking refuge from the pain of labor. It was a major effort to pull myself out of that place to try to interact with a doctor or anyone. Mom has been so mentally inverted the last day or two. As I am getting ready this morning to drop Andrew off at daycare and head over the Hospice Center for the day, I find myself hoping that Mom will look at me when I come in her room. That her eyes will register that I'm there. That we could hold hands or cuddle or even talk. But unless things have improved quite a bit since her move, I don't think any of those things will happen. My dear, sweet mommy has retreated to some place where she can't reach out to us anymore. Or maybe not. I'll see today.

Dad stayed with Mom at the Hospice Center overnight. Michael was on his way to pick him up this morning. Last night, Mom's brother Peter and his wife Marci drove up from Iowa to be with us.

I'll bring my laptop to Hospice today in case the center has wireless internet. I've received some really nice emails from people in the last days and weeks. Thank you so much. It feels really good to know that so many people care about Mom and about Dad and about me.

That's the update for now.

Althea

**Wild Geese (2007-08-28 11:31)**

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver

My friend Anne sent me this poem, and it really moved me. Thought I would share it with you.

## Morning at Hospice (2007-08-28 11:45)



Aug. 28: 1:30 pm. I had a very nice, quiet morning with Mom. I came in to the Hospice Center at about 8:15 this morning. Dad had left just a few minutes before with Michael. From the notes Dad left, it looks like Mom had a relatively restful night, punctuated by a few episodes of anxiety or restlessness. When I arrived, she was sleeping peacefully. I opened the windows and the doors and let the sunlight and morning breeze spill into the room. I sat on the bed with Mom and told her about the beautiful morning. I curled up with her and talked to her and sang her songs she likes. She hasn't eaten or drank anything as far as I can tell for the last 24 hours, and she didn't respond at all to me, but it felt really nice to be able to hold her and stroke her hair and to tell her how I feel and that she can go when she's ready.

A bit later in the morning, Mom's brother Peter, and his wife Marci came by to visit. They were followed by Michael and Terry. I got on Mom's gmail account to get emails that I can read to her. Then Terry and Michael and I sat out on the beautiful private patio outside Mom's room.

A doctor came in to check out Mom, but she wasn't interested in being touched, so he just made sure she wasn't wanting medication or anything and then we talked for a while. He said that one thing that is probably happening to Mom is that her liver is breaking down from the cancer. That means that her body isn't able to filter the toxins from her blood system, and she's getting a buildup of ammonia and other non-healthy chemicals in her body. The physical effects of this match what Mom is experiencing...exhaustion/fatigue, irritability to communicate, anxiety, etc.

Apart from a couple startling moments when she got up to go to the bathroom, Mom's been resting pretty quietly today. She hasn't wanted, but we have been encouraging occasional use of an anti-anxiety medication, but her alertness and responsiveness doesn't change at all even when she is off all medications.

I posted some photos of Mom and of her room on the website.

### **Visits from loved ones (2007-08-28 16:06)**

Aug. 28: 6:00 pm. It's been a full and long day today. Hard to believe that when I walked in the door at 8 am this morning that I had never been here before. This afternoon, Mom had several visitors, and she surprised us by responding verbally to most of them. Peter and Marci brought Mom's mother, Mum, to visit early this afternoon. Before she left, Mum talked to my mom, and Mom opened her eyes and some form of communication passed between them. That's a first over the last three days. Then when Peter said goodbye, she said "hi Peter." She also said, "hi" when Dana and Terry's neighbor Connie visited.

Maretta and Kyle just came in. Maretta hasn't seen Mom since Sunday, and she's having a really hard time coping with the rapid and downward changes in Mom's health. It's such a sad time.

8:45 pm. Maretta had a nice visit sitting next to Mom. At one point, she told mom that she loved her, and Mom whispered back, "I love you too." It was a remarkable moment for me, because since Saturday I haven't seen her say something like that.

Bryan brought Andrew by after work today, and he and I got in bed with Mom for a few minutes. Mom said his name, and I think she knew he was there. Andrew kissed her hand and said that he loved her before he left.

Maretta, Kyle, Bryan, Andrew, and I all went out to dinner after leaving. Michael was on his way over, and Terry and Dad were still there with Mom. Bryan had offered to go back and spend the evening with whomever was still there, but it turned out that Tom came over too, so Michael had company to pass the time. Dad is planning on staying overnight again in the rollaway bed they have set up.

I am going to return to Hospice tomorrow morning and spend the day with Mom again. Overall, today was a good but rather exhausting day. It feels good to have a day with no major medical crises or major decision-making necessary. Just a lot of adjusting and crying and talking and coping.

Mom hasn't wanted or had anything to eat or drink since she threw up on Sunday night. She's been getting fairly regular doses of an anti-anxiety medication and occasional doses of morphine. The medications seem to help.

That's the update for tonight. Until tomorrow,  
Althea

## **Argh (2007-08-29 08:17)**

Aug. 29: 10 am. I just wrote a long post about Mom's status and my thoughts and feelings, and when I hit "save" my connection had timed out, and it disappeared.

So I'll attempt to re-create, but I need a moment to step away from the computer so I don't smash it:)

A

## **Wednesday morning update (2007-08-29 08:29)**

Aug. 29: 10:30 am. I'll try doing this post again. There are few things that irritate me more than trying to re-create something that I had written and proofed and thought done. Oh well! I think I'll just pretend I never wrote that earlier post. This is the first time I am sitting down to write an update of the morning.

I got here a little after 8, and when I peeked in the door to Mom's room, she and Dad were both snoozing away in the quiet, darkened room. So I waited in the nice sitting area across the hall until Dad woke up and the doctor stopped by. We talked with the doctor about Mom's pain med needs. On top of the difficult journey she is in the process of undertaking, Mom also has a bladder infection. I think that it has caused her quite a bit of discomfort and has led to some of her moments of anxiety the last day or so.

So we're dealing with the bladder infection, and I helped the nurses this morning get Mom washed up and wearing some pjs. Flowers have been coming into her room, and there are lots of sunflowers and lilies, which makes me happy.

11:45 am. I was just on the phone this morning with Joe for quite a while. He's at Bowdoin in Maine, and we just talked about everything that is going on here and how everyone is doing. His classes start tomorrow, and he's kind of wondering how he will possibly get his mind around a new set of courses given the life-altering things that are happening here at home. Joe's an amazing person, and he's showing so much maturity and fortitude and empathy through this whole ordeal.

That said, I'm surrounded by amazing people. I feel really lucky to have a community both here and afar who are pouring love and support on us all. I think I received about 30 emails yesterday from my friends and most of Mom's friends and family members... It helps hold me up.

I'm feeling a little brighter than I was this morning. While I was coming in to Hospice this morning, I was overcome with a feeling of general weariness. I just felt like there was this big weight filling my whole torso that just wasn't going to go away. The fact that Mom is still here with us makes me grateful, and I'm really trying to appreciate these days of knowing that she is here and I can talk to her and touch her. But I'm also becoming increasingly aware that she is not going to be here long and that things in our lives are never going to be the same. I ache so much for my siblings and my dad and Terry and all Mom's dear friends and siblings and her Mom and our extended family and everyone who is hurting right now.

Mom has made so many peoples' lives brighter and more gracious and more true. I feel like she's had a positive impact on the lives of so many people. She's been so open about inviting us all into her circle. My mom is the hub of a huge web, and I so hope that we can find ways of binding ourselves tighter together to keep our web intact without her physical presence at our center.

It hurts so very much to contemplate life without her.



Not just for myself, but for my children and my siblings and their spouses and children, and my poor dad, and so many of us who rely on her for her solid advice and for the way that she can subtly positively impact all our lives.

It's just such a sad time.

Mom's been resting very peacefully, breathing evenly and slowly for the last hour or so. I'm glad I can sit next to her as I think through a lot of these thoughts. It feels good to be in her presence.

With love,  
Althea

### **Flowers from friends (2007-08-29 12:02)**

Aug. 29: 2 pm. Mom's room is full of beautiful flowers. Daisies, sunflowers, glads...they brighten each table and bring such spirit into this lovely room. Dad brought some CDs and Mom's Williamsburg blanket from home. Feels more homey with the sounds and sights of Dennis Drive filling the room.

Becky (Joe's girlfriend) came over around noon today for a visit. Bryan had brought lunch, and Terry arrived a few minutes earlier.

Becky told my mom about the wash cloths she had knit in the last week since Mom and Maretta re-taught her how to knit. Soon after she and Terry arrived, Mom sat up and had several moments of intense anxiety.

This seems to happen every so often (every 4-6 hours), and it's really hard to witness. She sat up and moved like she wanted something or wanted to go somewhere, and then she would cry out in long, wailing keens. The staff here have told us that this can be due to physical pain or discomfort, but it can also be because she is grieving heavily for herself and for all of us. It really feels to me like it's grief.

It's really hard to witness her going through these intense moments. I held her in my arms and we all touched her and talked to her. After a while, we got some anti-anxiety meds and some pain meds. A while later, she had a second episode, and Bryan held her for a long time. Since then, she's been sleeping peacefully again. A reiki masseuse came by to offer Mom a treatment.

She gave me one too. It felt wonderful.

That's the update for now.

Althea

### **Slow day today (2007-08-29 15:58)**

Aug. 29: 6 pm. I'm about to head out for the evening. My dad's sister, Julie, and her husband, Kevin are here now. Mom's friend Mary came up from Chicago and is going to stay with me tonight so she can see Mom again tomorrow morning. Mom's cousin, Paula, and her aunt, Carol also came over to visit. They helped us put a nice foam pad on Mom's bed to help her rest more comfortably. Becky and Terry have stayed all afternoon, sitting out on the patio or

sitting near Mom. And Terry's neighbor, Connie, came over again to see Mom this evening.

Dad's driving back from Monroe...he was down there visiting his parents today. He and Michael and Tom are going to work something out so someone can be with her and able to quickly respond to her throughout the night.

Today felt quite a bit like yesterday. It seems that Mom's condition has been relatively stable for the last 48 hours. It's kind of a relief to be able to take a breath here for a moment. It also feels like some strange flower-filled twilight zone. Fortunately, Mom snored while she slept today, which sounded very home-y and reassuring to me:)  
Until later,  
Althea

#### **Little change this morning (2007-08-30 07:25)**

Aug. 30: 9 am. I just arrived here this morning with Mom's friend Mary. There was little activity overnight. Mom was pretty restful and Dad said that she was only restless and agitated briefly around 2 am.

When I left at 6 am, Dad had recently arrived. Also, Mary Isaacson and her son Donald, past neighbors from the other side of our duplex, came by to visit Mom. Mary brought a frame for Mom's room with the pictures from Mom's last Christmas card...a picture of the four of us kids and a photo of Mom and Dad and Andrew. It's a nice reminder of happier times we all had together.

Julie and Kevin took Dad to The Great Dane for dinner last night, and Michael came over to stay with Mom for the evening. Dad went home around 10:30 to sleep for a couple hours. Tom came in the late evening and stayed with Mom until I arrived in the morning. Dad also came back at about 2 am and slept in the chair next to her through the night.

I took Mary Read home last night. Bryan made us all a yummy dinner, and after a while, Maretta and Kyle came over to visit too. I had a nice talk with one of Mom's friends, Debbie Riccio. Then for a few hours, I worked with Joe and Terry to set up plane flights for Joe to return home. He's flying in to Milwaukee this afternoon, and Becky is going to go pick him up. Just so everyone knows, I don't think it's worth bothering with "bereavement fares." From what I'd read, they are often higher than normal tickets, and when I tried to get one for Joe, the ticket cost \$250 more than the price I could get normally.

Mom's developed a cough and a bit of a rattle in her chest at times. It's a beautiful day today, and I'm torn but hoping that Mom doesn't have to struggle down this difficult road much longer.

## Quiet afternoon (2007-08-30 14:07)



Aug. 30: 4 pm. Not much to report on this afternoon. Joe should come walking through the door any moment. Mom's been sleeping peacefully for the last six hours. She had a period between 9 and 10 this morning when she was quite agitated and unhappy, but since that time, her breathing and snoring and body language conveys a sense of peace.

Photos from the day are in the gallery.

I crawled into Mom's bed with her again this morning for a while. Mary Read was here and sat by Mom's bedside until about noon. Her daughter, Katie, is getting married on Saturday, so she had to leave to return home. Terry came over in the late morning, and Maretta and Kyle also came at about noon. Maretta has knit about four feet of a shawl in the last week to help pass the time. It's so long now that it covers her toes.

Bryan came again for lunch, and Maretta and Kyle stayed with Mom while Terry and Bryan and I went down to the beautiful cafeteria to have lunch. After lunch, we pretended for a while that it was just a normal, nice afternoon, and while Terry stayed with Mom, Maretta, Kyle, and I went to Carl's Cakes to keep an appointment to test possible wedding cakes. They were yummy. My favorite was the lemon poppyseed.

When we returned to Hospice, Jack and my friend Anne were here, and so we got to visit with them and they got a chance to see and talk to mom.

This afternoon, Mom has been very peaceful, but her breathing continues to fluctuate between slow, easy sleep or snores and a more disturbing gasp between long moments of quiet.

4:45 pm. I'm on my way home here in a few minutes. Joe and Becky arrived pretty recently, and Maretta is going to stay at my place tonight. I think that we have several visitors expected this evening, and the plan is for Dad and Tom to spend the night here with Mom again.

It's hard to see Mom seeming to lose her grip on life, but it's much harder for me to see the affect that is having on all those who love her. I've received dozens of emails from people seconding the idea that Mom has been the center, the hub of a tremendous network of people. And we're all hurting together as we prepare to say goodbye.

With love,  
Althea

### **A new beginning (2007-08-31 07:30)**

Aug. 31: 9:15 am. I woke up to sunshine and cool air drifting through my open window. As I lay in bed, appreciating the loveliness of the morning, I wondered where Mom was and how the evening had gone. All night I had dreamed that she had died and I'd been trying to figure out how we were to all going to be OK. Lying there in bed, and actually, now as I sit and type on my front porch, I have a stronger sense of being loved by everything around me. The tree feels maternal...the wind seems to caress...

So I talked to Mom and told her that I didn't know how I was going move forward and make her absence OK for all those who need her. I don't know how I am going to make things OK for Michael and Maretta and Joe and Dad and Terry and for everyone who loves and needs her so much. So I asked for her help. I asked her to assist not just me but everyone in her circle so we can all help each other and make this OK. I don't want her death to be a detriment, a blackened mark in our lives. I don't want me or the kids to be lesser, sadder people because of this loss. I know that not having her here, with us, guiding and inspiring us is a loss and a sadness that we will always have. But I'd like us to find opportunities for this massive life change to make us deeper, more compassionate people who breathe life ever more deeply. I hope that having lost the person who is the core of so much of what we do that we can find loving, wonderful ways of weaving that gap together so that we become a strong community with fewer members but perhaps greater spirit.

### **A peaceful end (2007-08-31 07:45)**

Aug. 31: 9:30 am. Dad called me at 7 am this morning to tell me that my dear, sweet mommy passed away in the night. He and our friend Tom were with her, holding her hand, and sending her off from this life with love. Dad said that around midnight her breathing became very shallow. Tom had been sitting with her while Dad slept. He came and woke Dad, and so the two of them were with her when her spirit left her body at about 12:50 am.

The news was not unexpected...Dad had called me last evening to say that it didn't look like she would be with us much longer. But I think I'd known that through the day. I said goodbye to her and kissed her when I left Hospice at 6 pm last night. I told her to have a peaceful night...and she did. For the 14 hours before she died, Mom was still and calm; she seemed to have finished struggling.

I'm so glad we had these last several days of time in Hospice for her to be well cared for and for us to spend time with her. I'm so glad for these last few mornings I've had, curled up with her in bed, smelling her hair and her skin and soaking up my last times with her physical presence. But in a way, I was ready for her to go and for us to turn to the next chapter of our story. This transition time has been challenging in its own ways.

Joe was staying with Michael last night, and Maretta stayed with me. I think that we're going to get together soon so we can be together.

So here's some logistical information. This evening, we are going to meet at Terry's condo (100 Wisconsin Ave, #801) around 6 pm for pizza and community. If you are reading this post and are interested in joining us, you're welcome. You can call me on my mom's cell phone (239-5453) if you have questions.

During my sad conversation with Dad this morning, he said that at this point he is thinking about holding a visitation on Friday, September 7 with a funeral on Saturday, September 8. Ryan Funeral Home will be helping us make arrangements. More discussion about this and about nice ways to honor Mom will be discussed over the next week.

### **As the day moves on (2007-08-31 14:27)**

Aug. 31: 4:30 pm. There's not a lot to report on this afternoon, but I'm used to doing regular web updates, so it seems right for me to sit down with the computer for a few moments. Around 11 this morning, Maretta, Kyle, and I came over to Michael's house where we joined Michael, his roommates, Joe and Becky, Terry, and Dad. We sat around and laughed and cried and talked about things together. After a while, we took a drive west of Madison to Riley's Tavern. It is a perfectly beautiful day today, and a drive through the countryside with the tall, drying corn and the beautiful wildflowers conveys a feeling of peace.

We went for a short hike along the Military Ridge trail, and then we came back and have scattered to take care of life's errands before tonight's get-together at 6pm. Speaking of which, if you're in the area, I'm re-extending an invitation for you to come to Terry's tonight to join us. 6 pm at 100 Wisconsin Ave. #801. Call me on Mom's cell phone 239-5453 with questions.

We're meeting with the funeral home tomorrow morning at 10 am to begin planning Mom's memorial. It's new territory for all of us.

Michael and I are going to work to set up an online community for people to share pictures, recipes, and stories about Mom, so if you want to start thinking about things to share, please do so.

One thing I've noticed is that we have very few pictures of Mom...mostly because she was always behind the camera. So I'm hoping that maybe our friends and family can help us fill out our collection by sending us images. We plan to set up something online to help facilitate that, but if you'd like to mail me prints, I'll scan them and send them back. Or you can email me images to [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com).

We are also going to compile a cookbook of recipes from Mom's collection along with stories that people have associated with those recipes. So if you feel like it, look through your recipe boxes this labor day weekend.

I'm glad the day is so beautiful. My mom loves the sunlight of late summer days.

## 3.9 September

### Late night thoughts (2007-09-01 01:35)

X Sept. 1: 3:30 am. It's the middle of the night, and I couldn't sleep, so I decided to get up to make some edits to Mom's obituary. During our pizza get-together at Terry's last night, he interviewed most of the attendees and from those conversations crafted a really beautiful and personal tribute for Mom. We're hoping to have it run in Sunday's paper, which means we need to submit it by noon on Saturday. Thought you might like to see our work-in-progress.

The picture is from Andrew's second birthday party on June 22. Mom was already getting sick again, but we didn't know it yet. In this picture, Andrew is sitting on her lap opening some engineer overalls. It's just so hard to believe that around 70 days ago, Mom was so vibrant and so fully present in our lives. It's been a hard couple of months.

MADISON - Margot Babler, 55, a woman of exceptional warmth and wisdom, died peacefully on August 31, 2007. She spent the final three days of her life at the wonderful HospiceCare center in Madison, surrounded by friends and family, the culmination of a 27-month battle with pancreatic cancer.

Margot was born on April 7, 1952 in Beloit, Wisconsin to Joseph L. and Lorraine (nee Bergmann) Davis. She is the granddaughter of Ward and Elsie (nee Leedle) Davis and Henry and Tekla (nee Loeber) Bergmann. She was a 1970 graduate of Ashland High School, and she attended UW Whitewater from 1970-1972. On August 12, 1972, she married Kim M. Babler.

She has lived in Madison since 1977. Margot was kind, selfless, positive, honest, subtle, with a wonderful sense of humor and an ability to laugh at herself. She was optimistic and non-judgmental, accepting human frailties with humor and love. She had an unusually even temperament, and she was called upon by many for her qualities of judgment. She gave freely to others without expecting anything in return, and she had a unique way of enriching and bettering the lives of everyone who crossed her path.

Margot had an especially strong love of family. If her children needed anything, she was there to help. Many times, she knew what one of them needed before they did, and she had the uncanny ability to make her children call her on the phone. She taught her children the importance of respect and of cultivating long-term relationships, of independence and high self-esteem. She was the most wonderful person in the world to hug: she knew the power of a hug, and she would hug you as long as you needed. She gave one of the most important pieces of advice a mother can give: "Eat something, you'll feel better." To far more than her immediate family, she was "mommy." She created a world in which a large extended group of friends became a real part of her family.

Several aspects of Margot's character and life were truly extraordinary. She was an arts lover and a romantic who valued beauty for the sake of beauty (and not to impress); yet she always gave very rationally grounded, rock-solid advice to others. She had an intuitive and accurate sense of the right course of action in any situation. To her family and friends, it felt as if she always had the right answer to every question: she understood. Yet she also knew that sometimes the best course is to just sit with another person, not talking. She had unusually good taste and a sense of refinement, particularly in aesthetics and cuisine. Indeed she was both a wonderful decorator and cook, in



the latter role not afraid to use butter and cream. Her dishes were made with love, and people across the country are using her recipes. Margot had a rare innate ability to connect with all people on some level and to befriend everyone. Her abilities to know what others were thinking seemed psychic.

Margot was not perfect: she was an untidy housekeeper, disorganized and dependably late. She always fell asleep during the first act of operas and plays. But on the things which really count in life, she was right there, right on target.

Margot is survived by her husband Kim and four very special children: Althea (Bryan) Dotzour, Michael, Maretta (fiance Kyle Zilic), and Joseph all of Madison; her grandson Andrew Dotzour; her mother Lorraine Davis of Janesville; three siblings, Peter J. (Marcia) Davis of Iowa, Kate (Greg) Brand of Washington and Kirk J. (Susan) Davis of Texas; aunts and uncles John Bergmann, Mildred Klumb, Carol Lamm and Edgar Bergmann; and friends who are as close as family including Terry Haller, Thomas Kuczmariski and Jack Kussmaul. She was preceded in death by her father Joe on May 14, 1973.

A visitation will take place on Thursday, September 6, 2007 at Bethel Lutheran Church, 312 Wisconsin Ave. from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. with a prayer service at 6:00 p.m. with Reverend Bill White officiating.

A second visitation will be held at St. Peter's Catholic Church, 5001 N. Sherman Ave. on Friday, September 7, 2007 from 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

The family also invites you to a funeral to honor Margot's life well-lived on Friday, September 7, 2007 at St. Peter's Catholic Church, 5001 N. Sherman Ave., at 10:00 a.m. with Father Roger Nilles officiating.

A memorial fund has been set up in Margot's name at Olbrich Gardens. For friends near and far, please visit [margots-forget-me-nots.com](http://margots-forget-me-nots.com) to share your remembrances, photos, and recipes.

### **Because we could all use a laugh (2007-09-01 02:27)**

Sept. 1: This Onion article, *Woman Overjoyed by Giant Uterine Parasite* has given us a lot of laughter in the last few days. Thought you would enjoy it too.

Woman Overjoyed By Giant Uterine Parasite

August 27, 2007 |

Issue 43•35

NEW BRIGHTON, MN—Immediately following a physician's examination for her menstrual cessation, 37-year-old events planner Janice Crowley told reporters Tuesday that she is "ecstatic" with her diagnosis of a rapidly growing intrauterine parasite.

"I'm so happy!" Crowley said of the golf ball-sized, nutrient-sapping organism embedded deep in the wall of her uterus. "I

was beginning to think this would never happen to me."

Crowley's condition is common and well-documented, with millions of women between the ages of 12 and 50 diagnosed every year. Studies have shown that while the disorder strikes without prejudice across racial, ethnic, and class lines, it bears a very high correlation with the consumption of alcohol at the time of infection. Although there is a low-cost daily medication available that can prevent the harmful symbiote with 99 percent efficacy, many women inexplicably choose not to use it.

Symptoms of potential uterine blight are wide-ranging and can include nausea, vomiting, constipation, irritability, emotional instability, swollen or tender breasts, massive weight gain, severe loss of bone density, fatigue, insomnia, excessive flatulence, hemorrhoids, vaginal tearing, and involuntary defecation.

"I can't wait to tell my parents!" said Crowley, who added that she is reasonably certain she contracted the parasite while on a romantic Caribbean cruise with her husband in May, most likely during a brief sojourn in the Virgin Islands.

"I think it must have happened in that little seaside villa on St. Thomas," said Crowley in an attempt to pinpoint precisely how long ago her endoparasitic ailment began. "Or maybe the night we went to that secluded beach on Tortola."

Crowley has reportedly refused a simple inexpensive outpatient procedure that would completely rid her of the detrimental organism in about an hour, effectively sparing her from the host of complications that will burden her and her family for the rest of their lives.

"We're thinking of naming [the parasite] either Robert or Lisa," Crowley said. "I just couldn't be more excited!"

Among the many signs that Crowley's condition is deteriorating rapidly is a frequent compulsion to consume foods in unorthodox and often revolting combinations.

"For some reason I can't stop eating olives dipped in chocolate cake frosting," Crowley said cheerfully. "And the other day I just had to have sardines with butter and jam. Crazy!"

In what will likely be the most painful experience of her life, Crowley will eventually require hospitalization in order to remove the giant entity. There is at least a 15 percent chance doctors will be forced to cut the parasite directly from her abdomen, a procedure that would result in severe trauma and scarring. If Crowley survives the operation, she will have to cope with the minimum 18 additional years of emotional and financial drain that is typically associated with this parasite, as well as irrevocable harm to her toned and relatively youthful body. This includes scarring to her breasts and stomach, and a series of visibly pronounced veins along her thighs and groin.

"Just think, in a couple of months I'll be able to feel it kicking," Crowley said of the creature that will soon be writhing restlessly inside her, increasingly and disproportionately robbing her of her strength and stamina. "It's truly a miracle."

Though Crowley is otherwise healthy, the fact that she is in her late 30s makes it much more likely that the parasite has already split and multiplied within her womb.

## **Onion or uterine parasite? (2007-09-01 02:39)**

✕ Sept. 1: I'm now at 17 weeks of pregnancy, and there have been quite a few times in the last week that I felt a little bubble-like sensation. I'm pretty sure it's the little one starting to say hello. This has been a really easy pregnancy thus-far. Andrew seems to enjoy saying good morning to the "teeny tiny" in Mama's belly, and he's doing a lot of baby roll-playing these days.

I have my next prenatal appointment in a couple weeks. Not particularly showing yet, but I seem to remember that it was just after week 20 that I really "popped" with Andrew. This little person is keeping me hungry and happy. I am enjoying this part of pregnancy where things are pretty low-key. One of my neighbors is due any moment. The anticipation!

Here's the Week 17 Update from Babycenter.com:

Your baby weighs about 5 ounces now, and he's around 5 inches long — about the size of a large onion. The umbilical cord, his lifeline to the placenta, is growing stronger and thicker. Your baby can move his joints, and his skeleton — until now, rubbery cartilage — is starting to harden into bone.

Some of it will remain cartilage for years after he's born. A newborn's skeleton has 300 parts (a combination of bone and cartilage). As your child grows, some of these parts harden and fuse together. By the time your baby reaches adulthood, he'll have just 206 bones.

## **Funeral and visitation details (2007-09-01 12:20)**

Sept. 1: The details of the funeral and visitation are as follows:

A visitation will take place on Thursday, September 6, 2007 at Bethel Lutheran Church, 312 Wisconsin Ave. from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. with a prayer service at 6:00 p.m. Mom has been a long-time member of Bethel. It's the beautiful church where I was married.

Mom's funeral will take place on Friday, September 7, 2007 at St. Peter's Catholic Church, 5001 N. Sherman Ave., at 10:00 a.m. A time for visiting with family will take place prior to the funeral from 9-10 am. Although she was not Catholic, Mom has attended mass at St. Peter's with Dad weekly for decades. Father Roger will be officiating the celebration, and there will be a time to share memories about Mom during the service.

Details about burial location and luncheon plans are still being determined. We're also hoping to create an opportunity for people to get together on Thursday evening after the visitation/prayer service. Stay tuned for details.

We've just completed what I can only summarize as a dreadful meeting with the funeral home to determine all the arrangements for Mom's funeral and visitation. Ryan Funeral Homes was a great help, and the conversations we had were all collaborative and productive, but I think all of us felt slightly destroyed inside by having to make these kinds of decisions about our mommy.

### **The little things and the big things (2007-09-01 19:39)**

Sept. 1: 9:30 pm. Today has been such a hard day. After the previously mentioned dreadful decisions we had to make about Mom's funeral, Maretta had the brilliant suggestion that she and I go out for spa treatments. So I booked Maretta for a massage, and I got a spa pedicure, and we recuperated through pampering.

I feel, though, like life is now full of little land mines, and until I really absorb and adjust to this new reality-without-Mom, I am going to keep stepping on these land mines and getting hurt. The last few weeks, I think I was mostly concerned about the big things we would miss without Mom here. I've been worried about her not being there for weddings and graduations and to see future grandchildren and all the celebrations and times of togetherness that we'll miss and need her. I've spent a lot of time mourning those big things from many people's perspective. But I think that at least this week, it's the little things that are hurting.

Last night at the get-together at Terry's, Maretta and I talked about how we were both waiting for Mom to come in. I actually thought to myself, "I wonder where Mom is." Clearly, I haven't fully come to grips with the situation at hand. Tonight while Andrew was taking his bath, he was being overly rambunctious in the tub. I was trying not to laugh at his antics, and I mentally filed away the situation as a story to tell Mom next time she asked me if Andrew was still cute. I just simply cannot believe that she's not going to call and ask me how my day was or that I'm not going to get to show her the color I painted my toes today.

It's too much. She's too much a part of my life, a part of the mirror I use to see myself, to be gone.

So I think I will sit here for a few moments in the throes of unhappiness and wait for a joke or a wave of energy to break the mood and set me back on the new track that I'm learning to travel. It's just pretty easy to get derailed these days.

Althea

### **Photo slide show of Mom (2007-09-01 19:45)**

Sept. 1: 9:45 pm. My cousin Scott dropped off a CD at my house this afternoon. I popped it in my computer this evening, and I was really touched by the video of pictures of Mom that he compiled into a video. Thank you so much, Scott.

WARNING: Before viewing, you may want to make sure you are in a situation where you can comfortably sob and have several Kleenexes nearby.

View the video here.

### **Share stories through an online forum (2007-09-01 21:53)**

Sept. 2: 12 am. Through the work of my very talented brother, Michael, we've set up an online forum for sharing stories, recipes, and photos of my mom. We named the website after my mom's favorite flower, the forget-me-not. You can check it out and begin sharing by visiting <http://www.margotsforgetmenots.com/>

Let me know if as you use it, you run into any snags!

### **Photo gallery of Mom is online (2007-09-04 21:55)**

Sept. 4: 12 am. I've had so many thoughts I've been wanting to write about these last few days, but we have been busy, busy, busy getting things ready for the events later this week. Maretta, Dad, and I have gone through the house and pulled together several boxes of things to display at the visitations on Thursday and Friday. And I've spent hours and hours going through photo albums and boxes of photos to dig out pictures of Mom. Heather came to stay with us the other day, and with her help, we've scanned or acquired almost 700 pictures of Mom from over the years. 100 of my favorites (so far...I hope more keep coming in from people) are in the gallery.

I've been so surrounded by things pertaining to Mom and things that embody her spirit these last days, that I know logically that she is gone, but she really doesn't feel gone. In fact, she feels very present. I've been trying to pull up feelings of sadness today, but either I'm too focused to be sad today or I'm just feeling to grateful for the rich legacy that she's left us to find room for mourning.

I found myself walking along today, repeating as my feet hit the ground, "Mom is dead, Mom is dead, Mom is dead." And now that I've written that down, it looks horrible, but when I was thinking it, I really felt like I was just reminding myself so I didn't forget again and again. I think that between the frantic pace of our preparations, the incredible outpouring of love and support I'm getting from friends near and far, and the wonderful feelings of peace that I get from looking through things from the past have given me a respite today. Who knows how tomorrow will go, but I'll take a bit of a peaceful day!

### **Thursday night event (2007-09-05 20:31)**

Invitation to a Dessert Reception

Following the prayer service at Bethel and dinner (on your own), Margot's family invites you to join us for dessert and a continuation of the celebration of her life.

Downtown Madison has a wonderful variety of restaurants for you to sample. Afterwards, some of Margot's favorite desserts will be available at Terry Haller's residence, 100 Wisconsin Avenue, #801.

We hope this reception will provide a nice opportunity to strengthen and fortify the web of community that Margot wove around us.

Questions?

Call Althea at 239-5453.

## **Remembrances from Paula Kopp (2007-09-07 09:24)**

My name is Paula Kopp and Margot and I were cousins. When I think through my memories of Margot, the first thing that comes to mind is how important family was to her. No one is more supportive of the role of mother than Margot.

When we moved to Madison six years ago, Margot was so welcoming and so excited to finally have a cousin who lived in Madison. Our move wasn't easy for me, and even more difficult for our children. Margot was such a great support to me. In her usual style, Margot was full of advice. But advice Margot-style was never a lecture. She had a way of relaying a similar situation and how she handled it but always reminded me how I should do what was best for our family.

As I have been able to see more clearly in the past two years, Margot had such a gift as a mother in figuring out what each of you needed as an individual. She knew that sometimes that is very different that what one of your siblings may need.

When Margot learned about her pancreatic cancer, she really didn't need to change her priorities. Margot was a woman of faith who knew what was important, and her family always came first. Because of my oncology nursing background, Margot and I had many discussions about the battle she was facing. I was privileged to be included with your family in many of the consults with the physicians, including a trip to Mayo for her surgery. We were usually a large group crammed into a small exam room.

The number in the group attending doctors appointments varied based on everyone's needs—it was important to Margot that everyone had the opportunity to hear the information that they were ready to hear; to not hear the information first hand if they weren't ready for that; and to miss appointments if they had other things to attend to. At the end of an appointment, Margot would always look around the room and make sure that everyone had a chance to ask their questions and have their concerns heard before she would let the doctor leave. Margot handled her disease the same way she handled her life. She showed her grace, patience and gentle determination. While I knew a lot about your family through Margot, I am grateful for the opportunity to get to know you as individuals these past two years. I watched you work together as an incredible unit, especially as we took over the lounge at Mayo during Margot's surgery.

You laughed, you knitted, you played games and you talked about how you felt. I know you will be able to continue to do all those things together as Margot's spirit lives through you.

I would like to finish by sharing something that has been a comfort to me for the last 20 years. Our cousin, Tom Bergmann, died from leukemia. Today would have been his 47<sup>th</sup> birthday. The following is a passage from the sermon by Pastor Koeppen at Tom's funeral that made everything make sense for me. I have changed it for the situation we are faced with today. "Cancer didn't conquer Margot. Margot conquered cancer. Death, the greater end of cancer, was conquered by Christ. In Christ, Margot has conquered the greater and the lesser. Thanks be to God. Margot has cancer no more and cannot ever get it again." Thank you for including me in your extended family. I have learned so much in watching all of you together.

## **Remembrances from Nancy McElmurry (2007-09-07 09:50)**

Margot and I first met in January of 1979. Here are some of my lifetime memories of her as I collected my thoughts the Saturday before she passed away. I put them down as a letter to her. Perhaps you will be able to pick up some



of her wonderful qualities through my memories:

My dearest friend, Margot,

I remember.

When you and I first met. I gathered up the courage to cross the backyard, little girl in hand, to knock on the door of another young mother with a little girl who looked to be of close age to mine.

You met me at the door in your robe. That didn't matter; you invited me in and we talked for over two hours while our little girls, just 4 days apart in age, played. After parting, both of us could hardly wait until we could get together again.

I remember watching for window shades to go up in the morning so that we'd know whether or not everything was on target for the day. We'd get our housework done so we could take the girls for a walk oh say, around 11:00. To keep them moving we gave them the goal of going to touch the next fire hydrant.

I remember your taking Katie for a while when I was sick. Before you left you asked if there was anything I wanted. Yes, I said, some peaches, which you cut up for me out of habit as we did for the little girls. We both laughed.

Thank you, my friend.

I remember two little girls on the playground in the backyard. Althea would climb and Katie would tell us about it. They would take turns on the slide, and once they wanted to trade jackets, which just confused us both a great deal.

I remember hanging diapers on the line at the same time.

I remember measuring cups holding raisins or cheese cubes, and the Nancy McElmurry approved method of making grilled cheese sandwiches.

I remember walks to Warner Park where the children could swing on the swings.

I remember two little girls receiving tricycles for their 2<sup>nd</sup> birthdays. Sometimes it was just more fun to ride each others. You gave a birthday party for three two-year olds – Althea, Katie and Kermie. When addressing the card I couldn't quite figure out how to spell Aufea – was that with an f or a ph? As that's how Katie said her name. Baby Tommy was just 3 weeks old at the time and I was still a bit out of it. We have laughed over that more than once.

I remember trips to the fabric store and little girls playing amongst the bolts of fabric. Shopping was so much easier together as the girls could entertain each other.

I remember shopping for saddle shoes for little chubby feet and red shoes for Althea.

I remember going to Bible studies together and leaving the children with Grandpa and Grandma McElmurry, where they played with teacups and monkeys. Your family has called Brian's mother Grandma ever since then. (And for a long time that's where Joe thought I lived.)

I remember little smocked dresses and piping around collars and discussing the best way to make a facing. We grew together in our sewing. Thank you, my friend.

I remember.

Little girls in large T-shirts decorating Christmas sugar cookies at my kitchen table; and I remember trips to the library and story books for the children.

I remember two little girls getting burns on their hands within just a couple of weeks of each other – Katie on a hot stove and Althea on a hot iron. They learned the meaning of hot. We were saddened by the little bit of sweet baby innocence that was lost at that.

I remember feeding ducks at Tenney Park and the pastry cloth you gave me as you felt I needed that. I still use it today.

I remember a snowman you and Terry made in the backyard in late April of 1980. Just a week later we had 3 little kids in a wading pool on a 90 degree day. That was the day my wedding ring fell in the crack by the front step.

I remember knowing we would move away. So you moved first. So hard even then to have to part.

I remember matching sundresses in different shades of blue gingham. And 3 children all in blue gingham at Vilas Park zoo.

(We had tuna for lunch that day.)

Thank you, my friend.

Once, you shared with me that all you wanted to do was get married, have children and raise them well. One of your favorite poems was:

Sweeping and dusting can wait 'til tomorrow,

for children grow up much to our sorrow.

So settle down cobwebs and dust go to sleep,

for I'm rocking my baby and babies don't keep.

Your children (and mine) have all grown up to be fine adults, but when did that happen? Margot, you've done well.

I remember many visits to Madison and spending time with you. We decorated Easter eggs before Easter, spent several

Fridays after Thanksgiving together, and worked jigsaw puzzles the day after Christmas. I remember many visits in your car as we drove to various places in Madison for various reasons - mostly as you provided mothers taxi service for

your children. We shared philosophies on raising children, education, political situations, and family life among other things.

I remember coming over to your house and just hanging out together - macaroni and cheese or tuna sandwiches come to mind.

I remember many trips to Terry's house and the pool with all the kids. What a great winter activity that made.

I remember your bringing Althea and Michael up to our home in the Twin Cities when Michael was just a baby. I believe that

is when jet canaries were invented.

(Think yellow kleenex on a tooth pick run through the air by 4-year old girls.)

I remember countless trips to yarn stores – sometimes we just looked and sometimes we bought. Thank you, my friend, for always taking an interest in my knitting and for getting it.

I remember specifically our field trip to Mt. Horeb on Valentines Day where we visited the woolen mill. We watched the spinning and plying machines at work, and I had a heyday in their shop. Then on into Mt. Horeb where we found a charming little café for lunch where they served us tea in individual pots sitting atop the teacups. We poked through the shops in town, including a cross stitch shop, on that beautiful warm Valentine's Day. It was a “just a sweater” day. Then it was on to Verona where we visited – guess what – another yarn shop. What a truly fine day that was. Thank you my friend.

“Chance made us neighbors, hearts made us friends.” Your cross-stitched sampler will forever hang in my kitchen. Thank you, my dear friend.

I  
remember going out to lunch many times to celebrate one or the other of our birthdays.

I  
remember when you and Maretta visited my in the hospital after my back surgery. You brought the softest, cuddliest white bear you could find. Then, when I talked with you just a couple weeks later, you first wanted to know how I was doing. It was only after that that you shared with me that just the weekend before you had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. We cried together. And for several days following I hugged that soft, white bear and wept and prayed for you as I healed.

I  
remember being so happy to see you at the end of the summer when you and Althea and baby Andrew brought Maretta up to school. You were on radiation and constant chemo, but seeing you there was a blessing I hadn't expect at the beginning of the summer.

Then just a few weeks later, I was able to travel to Madison. Even though your treatment was taking quite a toll on you, you wanted to visit the yarn shop. What a pair we made as neither of us could walk all that well. Just a few days later you back in the hospital.

I

remember celebrating New Year's Eve with you at Terry's condo. You put on a beautiful spread, you showed me the baby blanket you were making (it was still a secret that it was for Heather), and we watched the fireworks. Yet another fun time together. Thank you, my friend.

The next time we saw each other was when I visited you in the hospital in Rochester following your surgery. We visited and knit. Mareta and I left you to rest while we had lunch, and - guess what - visited a yarn shop, as Mareta had been bitten with the knitting bug. I

remember purple tulips in your window against a backdrop of lightly falling snow. And I

remember Mareta sitting on the floor tending your large, green plant when a frog jumped out on her. Oh my!

Carpe Diem! We all rejoiced that the treatment and surgery had extended your life that Memorial Day weekend a year after your diagnosis.

I

remember numerous phone calls just to keep in touch. Thank you, my dear friend, for always caring.

And just last Thanksgiving I

remember spending yet another Friday after together. Maretta joined us as we went to the U and saw the knitting exhibit honoring Elizabeth Zimmermann. What a fun thing to share together. I wish I still had time to make that sweater for you.

Most recently I realized how sick you were, and I had to come swiftly to see you. This time I cut up your peaches and brought you a cuddly lamby – I know how special lambies are to you. We talked knitting once again, and enjoyed sharing about our daughters' upcoming weddings and their dresses. We laughed some, we cried some, we held hands and hugged and looked forward to visits down the road, which both of us knew would never come to be. Thank you, my dear friend. Somehow, we had come full circle.

I will see you again, dear friend. And I haven't forgotten that special request for Andrew's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday that made us both cry.

And as you said as we last parted, "Don't leave." So I say to you, friend, don't leave. Don't leave.

"I'll love you forever; I'll like you for always. As long as I'm living, your friend I will be."

Thanks, dear friend, for a lifetime of wonderful memories. I will never stop being your friend.

Love,

Nancy



## Remembrances from Dad (2007-09-07 18:41)

Thoughts About Margot  
September 7, 2007, Sharing Time, St. Peter's Church,  
Madison, Wisconsin  
Kim M. Babler

We are in the right place today as we were last night at Bethel..... because Margot is a Child of God.

She comes from a religious, devoted, loving, caring, down-to-earth, family and extended family. Many of her values and ways of living life she learned from them and watching how they lived their lives. It made me feel good as I met them because they are much like my family and extended family. It was because of the way my Mother and Dad raised me and my family and extended family that Margot and I could have such a common bond.

[This paragraph not included in remarks because of length of time: Part of her family legacy included clergy. In our living room we have an example - a rocking chair that has a plaque with the following legend, "Presented to - Gotthold Heinrich August Loebor (1853-1944) - by his congregation - Saint Martini Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin" Her roots run deep.]

I also found myself learning from her family. Her Mother, Lorraine, affectionately known as Mum to our family, often explained to me how to listen to God. It has helped me and I use her advice in my life because she is right.

This is the right place to be today.....

It where our family sat over there, near of St. Peter, most Sunday's unless out of town or at Bethel.

Sometimes there was a pew full of wiggly kids. (Margot had to remind me it would get better)

Sometimes they sat quietly eating Cheerios (when very young) or paging through their illustrated Bible.

We celebrated our Christmas's here. We usually attended the Children's Christmas Eve service at 4:30, often with a child serving in the role of Shepard, Wiseman, or Mary - or in a choir. We grew up here. We had family or friends join us. Margot and Joseph joined the Bell Choir, which became know to us as "Joe and the Ladies", or Joe accompanied Bill with his oboe. We ask for guidance here, help and forgiveness. We prayed for our children and their future. 15 months ago Margot and I remarried here. And the last 27 months, we prayed for guidance here and were blessed with a basket of Miracles. We were heard. During those last two years Margot and I would discretely hold hands through most of each service.

Margot's relationship with God is best expressed as Love. She knew God loved her and embraced Him. She fashion that Love into her life and into a world into which anyone is welcomed. Her family and school friends have always been in her life, then she included me as well as many college friends, then welcomed each of her children and many new life friends many who are here today.

Driving up to the Hospice Center last Wednesday after a short time away, it occurred to me we were actually living in Margot's world - the world she created from love, friendship and the gentle ways of her person. That may seem strange to say. As her husband, I always thought we were on a mutual path between two people, making their

way together. What I discovered was that some time long passed, it had really become the life she created – and – like the gravity of a planet-world carrying along its moon, I was fully living within her sphere. The same was true for many, many others to a similar or different degree. I smiled.

When you look at the photos on Althea and Bryan's family website, it is no accident that there are lots of people in them. They are all people that traveled in Margot's world and mine. They are people that first came to her from work, college days, from neighborhoods, through her children and school, from her interests, through friends, and people whose hearts she just captured. During the last two years, she also made friends with people who were also fighting cancer, sharing her good fortune in living and successfully battling back this disease for so long.

You know Margot is magical.

For anyone who has had children you will recognize this thought.

When you first think about having children, you image what they will be like, their personality, how they look, and maybe how they will approach life. When they actually are born you marvel at who they are. They are much more wonderful that you could have ever believed.

When I thought about what my life partner would be like, I had an image. Then came Margot. If God have given me a magic wand, I could not have begun to approach the wonderful woman that she is.

I remember the first time I met her. I was a college student bagging groceries in the Whitewater Piggly Wiggly. John was working the Young Republican table on the campus when she stopped to sign up. After talking to her for an hour he decided she would make a good candidate. (John has picked people over the years for county boards, municipal government, mayors, and the legislature, so his judgment is good.)

John thought I should meet her. I saw John breezing into the store with the good-looking college girl trailing him. She was statuesque, confident, and fresh. He introduced her. I can't remember what we said, but I remember her firm handshake, delightful smile and elegance. It was brief. As I watched her leave, I said to myself, "she is great!" After a pause, I also said, "R- i - i - i - g-h-t!!! Just forget it." But I couldn't forget.

She did run for office, Student Publications Board, and defeated a campus radical that eventual burnt down "Old Main". While we worked in common on campus politics, it was some time before we became romantic.

We fit together so well, I didn't really try to analyze it in those days. Today, I know more about what attracted me to her.

What Margot wanted more than anything was to Love and be Loved. Her notes to me were always signed, "Love Me".

Margot valued more than anything being a wife and mother. And she excelled at being a Mother. She wanted to find her family, have them grow into strong, independent, and be adults that would Love each other as well as be her life long friends.

She also wanted a wide circle of friend that would be as close as family who she could love and with whom she could share life's adventures. She accomplished all of her life's goals but one, to share more time with her friends and next generation. That's what attracted me to her and made me want the same goals in her world.

35 years ago August 12th, Margot's Dad – Joseph – led her down the aisle of a Beloit Church. He gave her hand to me for her new married life. On the last day of this summer, just one week ago, on a quiet star-studded night, I held her hand again and prayed as she gentling passed. Taking her other hand, invisibly, was her Dad now leading her into God's world. She was never alone and she always with people who loved her. (Thanks Tom)

You know the best thing about today.... Margot's world will go on. That's is one of the things we are here resolved to do. While her help will be felt only in the softest ways, we will do what she wanted. Love each other, cherish our families, hold our friends close, lean on our God, never miss the beauty in nature or in what people create, look for goodness, purge anger and worry, and look for ways to heal. As she told me over three decades ago, she wants us to remember her and smile, to be happy for her (as soon as we can), and make her life's work in love flourish. And then, when we have exhausted all of the life we can possibly live, she will take our hands on that journey and greet us with the biggest hug. Love you Margot. Love Me.

### **Remembrances from Heather (2007-09-07 20:05)**

My name is Heather Lerner.

I was an only child and I really wanted siblings. As a kid I would go shopping with my mom and try to convince other kids to come home with me—especially if they seemed to be arguing with their siblings or parents. I'd tell them we have a nice family, nobody argues or cries, but none of the kids ever did come home with me.

In high school I became close friends with Althea and little did I know that in doing so I would also become part of a family I'd always dreamed of. It wasn't long after I met Althea that she invited me over to the Babler household and in rapid succession I gained two brothers, two sisters and another set of parents. Throughout high school and summers and holidays during my college years I spent many hours at the Babler house, playing and cuddling with the kids, Michael, Maretta and Joe and talking with Margot. We went canoeing and ice skating together and to American Player's Theatre and I reveled in my newfound family. After my own parents went to sleep I'd spend the evening hours with the Bablers, enjoying peaches and cream, cookies, and hot cocoa made by Margot. Margot helped me through the difficult and formative years of late high school and college. A time when I was trying to figure out who I was and what I wanted in life. I was always amazed with how Margot knew when there was a universal right answer, like choosing the color eggshell or ecru rather than white for interior walls, and when there were many right answers but only one right answer for a given person. She also knew that the one right answer had to be discovered by the individual and was adept at helping me navigate my thoughts to find my own right answer.

I hope that some day I can be the kind of mother Margot was to me.

I just want to tell one story that Margot loved to tell and told often. I chose this story because it emphasizes how Margot's warmth embraces so many people and I am not the only person she drew into her family effortlessly.

In college when I brought my then boyfriend, now husband, Michael, to Wisconsin for the first time, we spent his first day driving all over Wisconsin meeting family. He was really tolerant throughout the day, but it was a lot of people to meet and impress. After a whirlwind of a day it was late when we got back to my parents' house and Michael was starting to take off his shoes and sigh in relief when I stopped him saying that we had one more place to go. But I promised it would be a good one. Michael looked at me and I could tell he was tired and thinking..."I thought I loved you...." So, at probably 10 p.m. we headed over to the Babler's house for my nightly ritual of playing with the kids and talking to Margot about the great truths in life. Like, always add butter, sugar and/or cream to make a good recipe.

In 2001, Margot attended our engagement party where she met Michael's grandpa Hahn and discovered that he and she are related. In her genealogical diggings she found that she and Michael are cousins, so in marrying Michael I actually married into the family that I had felt a part of for so long.

One night a year or two after meeting Margot, Michael and I were back in Wisconsin and had arrived at home after another whirlwind day of holiday festivities with family. As I started changing into my pajamas Michael was on the phone with Margot. After he hung up he looked at me climbing into bed and said, "well, I'm going over to Margot's, you can go to bed or come with me."

## Remembrances from Terry (2007-09-07 20:12)

Margot Babler Funeral  
St. Peter's Catholic Church  
Friday September 7, 2007, 10:00AM

### Terry Haller Remarks

I am Terry Haller, and I am a close friend of the Babler family. In fact, I have been like a second father to the kids. Imagine a strange man come over to their house every day for a period of 30 years – and they never once called the police! Indeed, their family was my family too, and Margot was the central focus of that world.

One of the greatest American playwrights was Thornton Wilder, and he was actually born in Madison in 1898. He lived here with his family where his father was editor of the Wisconsin State Journal. His family's home was located on the same land where my Maple Bluff home was located, and in 1984, when I purchased that home, one of the first things Margot and I decided to do was to tear out some moldy pine paneling in the basement recreation room and discard it. We later discovered to our horror that this paneling had been transplanted from the Wilder's living room when the latter home was torn down in 1926.

Wilder's greatest play, *Our Town*, was also Margot's favorite. This play is far more than a staple of high school theater departments. Indeed few if any works of literature have better served to illustrate the relationship between everyday life and the eternal. The play tells the story of a normal family in the simple days of early 20<sup>th</sup> century rural America. The first part deals with daily life, the second with love and marriage, and the final part with death and remembrance. It is from the third part of this, Margot's favorite play, that I read now. Emily Webb, who has just died in childbirth, asks the God-like Stage Manager from her grave to relive her twelfth birthday. This wish is granted, but the experience is too much for Emily. She cannot bear to deal with the mundane details of everyday life, knowing how precious they actually are and knowing what the future holds:

MR. WEBB: Offstage Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl? EMILY: In a loud voice to the stage manager I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. She breaks down sobbing The lights dim on the left half of the stage. Mrs. Webb disappears. I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back – up the hill – to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-by, Good-by, world. Goody-by, Grover's Corners ... Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking ... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths ... and sleeping and waking up. Oh earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. She looks toward the stage manager and asks abruptly, through her tears: Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute? STAGE MANAGER: No. Pause The saints and poets, maybe – they do some. EMILY: I'm ready to go back. She returns to her chair besides Mrs. Gibbs. Pause

And so, on a rainy September afternoon, Emily Webb, having died well before her time, returns to her grave and to the ages. Farewell, Margot.

### **Remembrances from Mary Read (2007-09-07 20:22)**

Margot and I first met in the fall of 1968. We had one of those friendships that just happens and is a gift from God. It was like we had always been friends. Over the years whether we talked daily or not for two months we always picked up where we left off.

I lived in the Episcopal Church Rectory and had to answer the phone either St. Andrews Rectory, Mary Culver Speaking or just Mary Culver speaking. Ashland was a small town and I was amazed that anyone wanted to be best friends with a Pk ( PREACHERS KID. ) That is a prelude of what I am about to say.

To everything there is a season. A time to be born and a time to die. Margot and I used to say this to each other often (probably because it was a hit song at the time) Little did we know what a true saying it was and is and how it would impact our lives over the years ahead. As I was driving home the other evening I heard a bit of a song by Celine Dion. I am what I am because you loved me. It describes the impact Margot had on my life.

I would like to read to you Margot's own words to me from our senior year book.

Dear Mary Culver Speaking,

To whom am I speaking? Oh, she's not home right now. I see. Well, would you deliver a message for me? Thank you.

Tell her Dearly called ( my mother named us Dearly and Darling. I always wanted to be dearly and thought my mother liked Margot better).

I wanted to make Christmas cookies one Friday night and was wondering if she was going to the game. If not perhaps she would like to take a walk through Northland College, fall down the hill, paint "70" on the football field with a

christmas tree or on the railroad trestle and sign our names,pick lilac sand talk about life and death. ( If we don't get waylaid by a Hummer).Or perhaps she would rather go for a ride in her car, whether it is a fun ride or just runs. ( to those of you who didn't grow up in a small town a fun ride was going over an elevated railroad track to fast and getting that tickly feeling in your stomach and a run was making the circuit up and down the main street in town)

We could always go to a party....(this is my memory...the only time I ever saw margot get mad was over the senior lock in at the Elks club.My parents were leaning toward yes we could go and hers were leaning to ward no. Margot wore wooden clogs in those days and she threw a fit and kicked her foot. the clog went flying off and to this day I bet there is still a dent in that ceiling.)

anyhow, we could go to a party.....like the street dance or Sue Leaky's party or a pre Sweethearts Ball party or a surprise birthday Party.(I threw Margot a surprise Sweet 16 sleepover)If she would rather, we could go downtown (it is a Friday night after all) and look through all the stores, then go ToJans and get some material and I could make her a formal. And we could always go on a picnic....ask her whether she Prefers Prentice Park,Lake Park or Copper Falls. Maybe she would like to sleep over....we could ask Josh ( my 80 lb german shorthaired pointer)to join us.....and we could giggle and talk and laugh and fall asleep holding hands, ( do you know that whenever we stayed with each other that is just how we went to sleep no matter what our age),unless, of course,we slept outside, in which case we would have iced tea and soda crackers.

I hope she is able to do something and isn't laid up with a ripped off toenail or a lost appendix or a tumor in her wrist.

Have her call me,won't you? I don't want to lose touch. And tell her this is lovely weather if it doesn't rain. She'll understand.

Love,

Margot



Rest in peace my friend.....

**I've got a sweet potato! (2007-09-09 11:23)**

Sept. 9: I can't say that I've focused a lot on my pregnancy the last couple weeks, but in the mornings when I first wake up, I do so enjoy lying quietly in bed, spending a few moments focusing on and sending love to this little being who is growing inside of me. I continue to feel faint bubble-burst like movements every few days. It's also been nice to know that we have something to look forward to as we move past the sadness of the last several weeks.

I should have an ultrasound sometime this month, so hopefully at that point we'll find out the gender and get a little peak at the "teeny tiny" as we currently call him/her.

The BabyCenter.com update for Week 18 is as follows:

Head to bottom, your baby is approximately 5 1/2 inches long (about the length of a large sweet potato), and she weighs almost 7 ounces. She's busy flexing her arms and legs — movements that you'll likely start noticing more and more. Myelin (a protective covering) is beginning to form around her nerves, a process that will continue for a year after she's born. If you're having a girl, her uterus and fallopian tubes are formed and in place. If your baby is a boy, his genitals are noticeable, though he may hide them from you during an ultrasound.

Through it all, Andrew is adorable (2007-09-09 11:42)



Sept. 9: Andrew has gotten short shrift in terms of web postings this past month. Fortunately, it's not because he's any less adorable, demanding, and marvelous than ever. Some pictures of Andrew including a few fantastic ones of Anne giving him a bath are in the gallery.

Here are a couple Andrew stories I've been meaning to share.

He now loves Robin Hood. Since Mom got sick, Andrew has seen quite a few movies. By far, his favorite is Disney's Robin Hood. He especially likes it when we make up Robin Hood stories to tell him. "Tell me story 'bout ROBIN HOOD," he says. Several times a day. Who knew the crazy adventures Robin Hood had until we made them up these last weeks!

To my great joy, Andrew also really likes reading field guides. His very favorites are the Sibley Guide to Birds and my African animals field guide. Since they are my books, he has to read them with the help of an adult. It's so cute to see him want to start at the beginning of the book and to hear him repeat the names shearwater, petrel, and albatross.

The little mister has been on a no-nap kick these last couple weeks. Isn't that good timing... Yesterday while he wasn't napping, he crawled mostly out of his crib, pulled some porcelain toys off the dresser next to him, and broke a couple of them. Yikes! I think we're going to be moving him to a mattress on the floor \*very shortly!

The mosquitoes are super thick right now, and when we go outside and the bugs are out, he runs around saying, "Get away from the bugs! GO AWAY mosquitoes!"

That's a few cute Andrew notes for now. They just keep coming!

I'm overwhelmed by the generosity of friends (2007-09-09 12:05)



Sept. 9: I've been meaning to write this post for several days, but it seems like each time I get home and sit down, I immediately fall asleep...a condition that is not compatible with writing a web post.

But now the funeral is a couple days past, and although Andrew isn't technically napping, he is resting in his room, and I have a few moments to write out how amazed I have been at the outpouring of love and support I have received over the last couple weeks.

Sometimes I felt so caught up in the river of flowers and food and emails and cards and caring gestures that I really had a hard time remembering that it is all because I'm losing my mother.

Here's a sampling of some of the wonderful things people have done...

- A couple of my co-workers came over to help clean my house and mow my (very-long, quite large) lawn.
- My neighbor Nancy brought me two meals and some delicious, fresh-picked apples.
- A group of good friends who have babies Andrew's age brought over a feast. There were an amazing number of dishes including cute labels. They also gave us a big bag full of tulip and daffodill bulbs. During the feast (pictures are in the gallery), Anne and Heather took care of nearly all the set-up and clean-up making it a totally worry-free event.

- Heather moved from Ann Arbor to Washington DC on Sept. 1-2. On Sept. 3, she flew out to spend the week here helping us. Despite the fact that her life was in humongous transition and that Sept. 2 was the one-year anniversary of her son Allan's stillbirth, Heather has been a tremendous support for me this last week. She scanned hundreds of pictures of Mom so I could share them electronically, and she put together the great picture posters we had at the visitations.
- Friends from far and near have sent me flowers and plants. My house is just filled with the beauty of sunflowers, orchids, and wildflowers.
- Some of the food that people brought to Mom and Dad's house ended up feeding us. Christy's pound cake and Sarah Kidd's lasagna were delicious.
- Anne came over with plants for my garden. She planted them and dug up a new garden bed for me in the back yard. I've been meaning to do that all summer! Anne came back a few days later to mulch and weed.
- My friend Kacy flew to Madison from Washington DC for Mom's funeral on Friday. She's a lawyer and has an unbelievably busy schedule. It meant a lot to me that she came out.
- Bryan's parents flew up from Texas to support us and help take care of Andrew during the events on Thursday and Friday. They are in the process of a really busy time, and it means a lot that they wanted make a point of coming here to hug and support us.
- Heather's mom just brought us a crock pot full of food, so now we're set for next week too!

I'm sure there's more...I keep remembering additional things! While there's not really anything that can make losing Mom feel OK, it's sure been nice to feel so supported and loved.  
Thank you!

### **Bryan is starting a new job (2007-09-09 18:55)**

Sept. 9: Bryan speaking, here... I wanted to share a piece of exciting news: I'm going to be starting a new job next week. For some time I've known that my job at Widen hadn't been the most fulfilling thing I could have been doing with my career and that I'd like to be doing something a little more meaningful to me. I was very pleased to find a job opening that appealed to me and even more pleased that they called me back and, after a couple of interviews, decided that I would be a good person to join their team.

The new company is called OpGen, which is a small, startup bio-tech company located on Madison's west side. I'm very excited about this opportunity for many reasons. First, the company is looking to create a diagnostic devices and software that could be used to make significant improvements in the detection of diseases in patients, This is precisely the "more meaningful" type of work that I've been looking for. Second, I will get to be a part of a small, core team that helps build this company. Currently there are approximately 8 people in the company and I will be the second person in the Software Development group. Finally, I get to be invested in the company through some stock options.

In summary, I'm going to start working as a core member of a new project, developing biomedical software that will improve peoples lives and, if successful, stand to make some good money out of it too. In all, this is about the ideal situation for a software developer. I'm very excited

about the potential that I see in this new job and I hope that it pans out to be as good as I hope will be.

### **Thoughts about Thursday and Friday's events (2007-09-09 19:05)**

Sept. 9: I feel so relieved and peaceful now that the various visitations and church services for Mom are complete. As we drove home from the cemetery on Friday afternoon, I felt limp and relaxed and so very relieved and emotionally drained...quite a mix of emotions.

From Saturday, September 1 through the morning of September 6 I had been working harder and more focused-ly than I usually consider possible. We all so wanted the events on Thursday and Friday to do Mom justice. We wanted to honor and celebrate and mourn her in a way that would help people get a whole picture of the person she is (was...I'm still working on the past tense thing).

Pictures of the Bethel visitation and prayer service and the reception at Terry's are in the gallery.

Pictures of the St. Peter's visitation, funeral, and the burial are also in the gallery.

On Thursday, I think we were all surprised at how many people poured through Bethel for the visitation. The room was absolutely full of beautiful flowers (see many of them in their own album in the gallery). Several teachers from DeForest were there, many, many of Mom's relatives, friends from far and near, oodles of Mom's co-workers from American Girl, even more of Dad's colleagues from the Republican Party...it was stunning. And exhausting.

I thought the prayer service that Pastor White was nice. Mom would have really liked the cloth that was used to cover her casket. It was Williamsburg-esque.

After the prayer service, we headed back to Terry's for a yummy dinner prepared by Lisa. It was nice to have more of a social opportunity to interact with some of the people who had traveled to town to help remember Mom. And the delicious desserts were an added bonus.

I drove home that night exhausted and in some degree of disbelief that we had the full actual funeral to get through the next day.

Friday morning dawned gray and rainy. We met at St. Peter's at 8:30 and saw that Ryan Funeral Home had again done a nice job of setting up all the tables of memorabilia to showcase Mom's rich life. Mom's casket was again open and set up in the center of St. Peter's church. It was quite strange to be in a space that was so very familiar and yet doing something that felt so bizarre and in some ways so terribly wrong...saying goodbye to our mom.

Just a note on the open casket concept. I think it's nice that people get an opportunity to see a person when they are dead. I can imagine that it is hard to really accept that someone is dead when the last time you saw them they were fully alive and healthy. But I really am weirded out by the artificialness of the embalmed body. For me (and I know that I'm a weird biologist-who-likes-the-grittiness-of-life-and-death), I'd much prefer the old fashioned parlor viewing that occurred right after the death. And for a burial, I'd love to have a green burial. I like the idea of washing and tending to a body when the person has died, but I didn't at all like seeing Mom the way she was made up and posed in her casket. It just didn't look or feel like her. And I found that to be pretty disconcerting. It also made it a little easier to let go, though. I don't feel like any of Mom is left in her body. What made her her has gone elsewhere, so saying goodbye and burying her was easier that way.

I thought that the funeral service was really nice. I keep finding myself humming the hymn "How can I keep from singing," which we sung half way through. My favorite aspect of the whole set of events was the time of sharing that came after the Catholic mass. My sweet brother Joe helped to MC, and several people spoke. I plan to get electronic versions of their comments so I can share them on this website. Dad started it out, followed by Mary Read,

Nancy McElmurry, Paula Kopp, Terry Haller, Heather Lerner, and last, Joe. For me, it was incredibly moving (I went through a pile of Kleenex), joyful, and painted a full picture of my wonderful mom. I hope that those who attended left feeling like they knew and loved her better.

We had a luncheon at St. Peter's following the reception. I had asked that some of Mom's crowd-pleasing dishes be made, including tater tot casserole and macaroni & cheese & tuna & peas. I also figured that Mom would have really liked lemon squares made with real lemons, brownies, and Minute Maid lemonade. After the sad and joyous funeral, it was nice to wander around and talk with some of the many people who had come to pay respects to my mom.

Sometime during the funeral, the sun came out, and the day turned beautiful. A somewhat smaller group processed from St. Peter's Church, up Highways CV and 51 to the Windsor cemetery. There wasn't a cloud in the sky above us when they moved Mom's casket from the car onto the grave site. I stayed until the casket was lowered into the ground and the vault was lowered down as well. Dad stayed until she was all tucked in.

It's a beautiful cemetery. There are photos in the gallery from our visit out there earlier in the week. It will be a nice place to visit.

### **So tired... (2007-09-09 20:28)**

Sept. 9: I'm sure that times will come when I am more sad, but since the funeral on Friday, I've just been tired. So very sleepy. I feel like the pool that is my well of energy had the plug at the bottom pulled out, and I am calmly feeling the water pour out. I'm almost looking forward to it all draining out, leaving me languid and limp. Or maybe that's already happened. In any case, it's going to take me a little while to physically, mentally, and emotionally recover from the last month.

I already miss Mom lots. I just changed my American Girl, Kirstin's, clothes from her summer to her fall outfit, and I have a painful pit in my stomach knowing that I can't talk to Mom about it. She always liked hearing about what clothes Kirstin was wearing. On the other hand, maybe now I don't have to tell her. She just knows in whatever way she is right now.

Maretta's future mother-in-law, Marilyn Zilic, sent me the following prayer when we were at HospiceCare. I had heard it before, and it is a nearly perfect interpretation of where I feel like Mom is right now:

#### Hopi Prayer

Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there.  
I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on the ripened grain.  
I am the gentle Autumn's rain.  
When you awaken in the morning hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
of quiet birds in circled flight.




I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
I am not there.  
I did not die.

### **Moving around (2007-09-11 18:50)**

Sept. 11: I had my third prenatal visit this afternoon. I actually had it scheduled yesterday, but I totally spaced the appointment. Good thing I'm not in charge of anything really important right now...I think my brain needs a break! Dr. Flannery said that everything looked good. She found the heartbeat right away, and the little one's heart was pounding away at about 160 beats/minute. Dr. Flannery thought that it was in the midst of a really active session...which would make sense since I felt it "plip" inside of me a couple times while I was in the waiting room. I scheduled an ultrasound for Tuesday, September 25...two weeks from today. Bryan and I are so excited for that appointment. We're looking forward to getting a glimpse of the little one inside and hoping to learn the gender. Hard to believe that in two weeks, the pregnancy will be around it's half-way point!

### **Now in the produce aisle...it's a zucchini (2007-09-15 11:09)**

 Sept. 15: The last week has flown by in a very calm way, and I was really shocked to see an update from BabyCenter.com in my inbox yesterday telling me that I am now 19 weeks pregnant. A little over a week now until I have my ultrasound appointment, and I'm feeling increasingly pregnant. These days when I bend over, I've started to make an inadvertent "oof" grunt. I also found this morning that it was uncomfortable to bring my knee up to my chest to tie my boots. Mentally, I think I'm also making a switch. I spent much of yesterday ogling baby clothes...an activity that hadn't seemed that pertinent in past weeks. Last night I almost woke Bryan up, because the baby's normal soft "blip"-like kicks had become little thumps, and I thought I could even feel them from the outside. Still not particularly showing, though, except for a little bump and looking rather thick around the middle:)

#### **Week 19 Update from BabyCenter.com**

Your baby weighs about 8 1/2 ounces, and he measures 6 inches, head to bottom — about the length of a small zucchini. The hair on his scalp is sprouting. If your baby is a girl, she already has 6 million eggs in her ovaries. This is a crucial time for sensory development: Your baby's brain is designating specialized areas for smell, taste, hearing, vision, and touch. He may be able to hear you as you talk. Research shows that he's learning to distinguish your voice from others, and he'll soon show a preference for it. Let Dad get in on the act, too — encourage him to talk to your baby.

## Updates on my siblings (2007-09-15 11:39)

Sept. 15: I've had quite a few people ask what Maretta and Joe are doing at this point, so here's a quick update.

Maretta and Kyle drove back up to St. Paul on Sunday, September 9. Maretta had gone up for a couple days last week to get settled, buy books, and attend the first day of classes. After returning to her apartment at St. Kate's on Sunday, Maretta spent a couple days lying low, and she started going to classes on Wednesday. Although she didn't try out for the fall plays, one of the directors approached her earlier this week and offered her a part in a three-person show this fall. So even though she had been thinking about taking a bit of a slower semester, it looks like she'll be working full throttle for the next month. I'm glad because she'll be doing things that she loves. Maretta is a senior majoring in theater.

Joe flew back to Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine on Thursday, September 13. He's planning on starting classes on Monday. He's going to take a couple classes this fall, work, and play his English horn in a quartet. I imagine he's going to have his work cut out for him the first few weeks since classes at Bowdoin started on August 30. Joe's a sophomore this year and is planning on majoring in philosophy.

While Joe was home over the last couple weeks, he's been staying with Michael, and Michael took off work Monday-Wednesday this week to recuperate and to spend time with Joe. I believe that Michael went back to work on Thursday at Excel Inns where he works as a computer guru.

I stopped in work at Gathering Waters Conservancy briefly on Tuesday and Wednesday, but other than that, I took off the whole week to recover and to spend time with Bryan since he was having his week off between jobs. After nearly four weeks of time off work, I'll be back at work on my normal schedule starting on Monday.

I think for all of us, it was good to take off some time after the trials and events of the last few weeks.

In talking with Maretta the other day, we noted that we're all learning to incorporate a deep sadness into our lives now. It's a lot different than what we've been dealing with the last couple years. A sense of loss and a gaping hole has replaced a previous constant sense of anxiety or alertness. I am glad to not have to continue to worry about the results of the next test. When would bad news come? How would it come?

The last month was much more serious...how much pain was Mom in? Was she acting normally, or not? If she wasn't acting normal, what did that mean?

So, bizarrely, I find myself experiencing a sense of relief on some level. I can still carry with me a constant, very low-grade worry that some accident will befall someone I love, but I don't have that same sense of potential impending doom. Now that the worst has happened and we no longer have our Mom here with us in our lives, we instead need to work through our grief and learn how to make our lives OK with this new, undesired reality.

If anyone wants to drop Maretta or Joe a note, here are their addresses:

Maretta Babler  
College of St. Catherine  
#145  
2004 Randolph Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55105

Joe Babler  
Bowdoin College  
33 Smith Union Hall  
Brunswick, ME 04011-8400

Not working much at anything! (2007-09-15 12:01)



Sept. 15: It's been a really nice week. With Bryan and myself having the full week off and Andrew in daycare at Karen's, the days were quiet and full of whatever we wanted to do. Sitting here now on the weekend, I'm feeling really glad that I was able to take this whole week to recuperate. I'm also a little shocked at how little I've gotten done. I pretty much divorced myself from computer this week, so not only did I not reply to the hundreds of loving notes I received throughout the month, but I am now behind on another 40 or so. Oh well!

I did get some productive things done. I paid Mom's bills, did some clean-up of material from the funeral events, and at least now have a rather complete list of the thank-you notes that need to be written. I'm so grateful to so many people. In retrospect, this past week would have been an ideal time to write a lot of those thank you notes. It was, however, more fun and more restorative to be a slug:)

With life moving at a slightly slower pace, Andrew was in a much better mood this week. We had some lovely evenings together. Pictures from the last week including a nice apple-picking trip we took last weekend are in the gallery.

Alphabet madness (2007-09-15 12:34)



Sept. 15: I'm constantly amazed how little brains work. Once Andrew decides it is time to do something, it surprises me how he can just go ahead and do it. I don't think he is any different from other kids in this respect, but it's such a privilege to watch him in action.

In the past few weeks, Andrew has decided that he loves the alphabet. So we went to the library and got him several alphabet books. Since that time, he's just been eating up letters. Today, he pointed at Bryan's shirt and said, "B - A - Y - L.." Well, then he lost interest, but Bryan's shirt said Baylor.

In other news, Andrew is still in love with stories about Robin Hood. He's not napping for us today. When he is feeling cooperative, he's just the funnest person to be around. I trimmed his curls while he was in the tub last night. They were getting a little excessive, but I just love them so!

### **Half way done?! (2007-09-22 19:27)**

✕ Sept. 22: I feel like my belly is doing some major growth this week. Objectively, I don't think I look any different, but it's somewhat uncomfortable down there. I'm still feeling the little one kick...little blip-y feelings. The other night, it was actually making it kind of hard for me to fall asleep. Such a sweet and wonderful feeling. My ultrasound is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 25. Hopefully we'll find out the gender at that point. I just can't wait to see the little munchkin...getting a sneak peak is such a treat!

From BabyCenter.com 20 week update

How your baby's growing:

Your baby weighs about 10 1/2 ounces now. She's also around 6 1/2 inches long from head to bottom, and about 10 inches from head to heel.

(For the first 20 weeks, we use measurements taken from the top of the baby's head to her bottom — known as the "crown to rump" measurement.

After that, we use measurements from head to toe. This is because a baby's legs are curled up against her torso during the first half of pregnancy and are very hard to measure.)

A greasy white substance called vernix caseosa coats her entire body to protect her skin during its long submersion in amniotic fluid. (This slick coating also eases the journey down the birth canal.)

Your baby is swallowing more, which is good practice for her digestive system. She's also producing meconium, a black, sticky substance that's the result of cell loss, digestive secretion, and swallowed amniotic fluid. This meconium will accumulate in her bowels, and you'll see it in her first messy diaper (although a few babies pass it in utero or during delivery).

### **Getting back into the swing (2007-09-22 19:38)**

Sept. 22: It's been a pretty good week. Bryan started his new job at OpGen on Monday. He's been sometimes overwhelmed, but in general, as the week progressed, I think he was feeling increasingly comfortable...feeling like he'll be able to do a good job working there. The past week, Bryan's been posting to a blog about his new job. Check it out!

I really enjoyed being back at work this week. Monday and Tuesday, I felt like my brain was doing a lot of catch-up to remember how to do things like read and process information, but by Wednesday, I felt like things were clicking more. Gathering Waters' land conservation awards celebration was on Thursday, and it went really well. It was nice to get dressed up (making a run to the Macy's MAC counter to get my eyes done :) and see many of our great colleagues.

I am traveling to Carleton on Thursday next week, but other than that, it should be a relatively normal, calm week in the office. I'm looking forward to it!

**Lovely times outdoors (2007-09-22 19:51)**



Sept. 22: I've been having some really fun times with Andrew this past week. Last weekend, the weather was cool and fallish. Bryan, Andrew and I all went to Cherokee Marsh for a nice long walk. Andrew didn't think that "walk" applied to him. He wanted to be carried. He did have a great time searching for nuts and pebbles and spying on grasshoppers and other insect life. It was a beautiful day.

On Sunday, we had a mostly great trip to Olbrich Gardens. The main bugaboo we ran into was the many water features. Andrew wanted to get WET. As we told him, "no" to putting his hand in the water, he ratcheted up the ante and decided he wanted to fully submerge himself in the water. As we walked over the bridge, he kept saying, "jump in!" I think he was just trying to stake out a strong bargaining position:~) Photos from Cherokee and Olbrich are in the gallery.

On Friday, Andrew and I joined my co-workers Pam and Vicki and their kiddos Clara and Alex for an outing to Eplegaarden Orchard in Fitchberg. It's so fun to see these little ones interacting and doing their thing. They're each just amazing.



I picked lots of apples, which I'm planning on making into apple sauce and perhaps other yummy things. The only problem is that Joe isn't here. He helped me peel and cut up the apples for the last batch of apple sauce. Without his help, I'm a little afraid that they may all just rot on the counter. Just kidding, Bryan.

Photos of the little ones playing at the orchard are in the gallery.

### Brother or sister?? (2007-09-25 06:01)

Sept. 25: Today is the day of my 20 week ultrasound, and I just can't wait to get a glimpse of the little wanderer inside. I asked Andrew last night if he thought that the teeny tiny baby would be a sister or a brother. He said sister. Then I asked if a sister was a girl or a boy. He said a boy. I told him a sister is a girl and a brother is a boy asked again which he thought our baby would be. He said sister. So that's Andrew's guess.

I think Bryan has no guess about gender, and I've been quietly thinking girl from nearly the beginning. I've spent the last week trying to get my head around the idea of, "what if it is a boy?" I'd be pretty surprised! But I'd be delighted either way. I kind of see myself as the mom of a boy. I like the idea of boys and brothers. When I first found out I was pregnant, I was hoping for a boy. But then I started to get a girl sense, and at this point, like I said, I'd be really surprised if it was a boy.

So exciting! I'll post an update as soon as I find out!

### It's a girl! (2007-09-25 10:03)



Sept. 25: I'm just back at a computer after my fun and heartwarming ultrasound appointment. The little one was bopping around inside. Very active and looking all complete and healthy. The ultrasound lady got a good look, and she said that we're having a girl. Yay! I'm so giddy and excited. Going out for French fries and a malt now!

Althea

### **I dream of Mommy (2007-09-28 16:20)**

Sept. 28: I just woke up from having the most amazing dream. Since Mom died...exactly four weeks ago...I haven't had any dreams about her. But last night I had this long and elaborate dream, and it was lovely.

In this dream, we were burying her with the casket open. And as we shoveled dirt onto her, I broke down and couldn't watch. So I was sitting in a nearby room (I think we were burying her indoors, hmm), Mom walked in, freshly showered and looking completely healthy.

Her hair was curling around her face, and her expression was calm and happy. She said that somehow the shoveling of dirt onto her had woken her up. I thought about telling her that her body had been prepared for an open casket funeral, and there was no way in the world that she could still be alive, but I decided to let that matter rest. Who cared, she was right there in front of me.

We held each other, and I cried and told her how much I had missed her.

Then, in one of those dream-like transitions, Mom and Andrew and I were out shopping together. She pointed out a couple things she thought I would like. In one case, I was holding the same item in a different color on the other side of the same display. I said, "I'm going to buy this, Mom. It's not every day you come back from the dead!"

Andrew was being a pickle, and Mom seemed to be having so much fun, was expressing so much relief at getting to watch him run around and do his marvelous exploration of the world.

For a long time, Mom and I wandered and shopped and talked...mostly about every day nothing. It was lovely.

Toward the end of the dream, she and I were curled up in her bed. She was wearing the night gown she wore some of her last coherent days at home, but now it looked good on her healthy, not-so-skinny body.

I cuddled close to her and smelled her skin. She smelled just like she is supposed to. I've missed that, without even knowing it. We laughed together at how white her legs are.

I was just so stunned to have her next to me, in my presence, and so fully alive.

She asked me if I felt like this was worth it. If the goodness I felt at seeing her again overshadowed the pain I would feel if she died again. And I told her I would take two more weeks of the torture of watching her die to have this one beautiful day. She seemed glad about that.

A couple moments later I woke up. My little sister is sleeping in the bunk above me; I'm staying with her in St. Paul this weekend. I spent a few moments thinking about how lovely it was to not have that sadness anymore. Then I realized that it had been a dream. Oh well. At least I got to see her.

I so hope I have more of those dreams. It really made me feel good. It made me realize that what I miss

most is spending time to Mom and being close to her. I really makes me sad to think that we won't be able to have anymore lazy days spent in happy company together. So if we can do that now and again in my dreams, that would make this new reality a little easier to bear.

And maybe when this new little baby is born, I can introduce her to Mom in my dreams too. Of course, I think she'll already know her well. I have a feeling that in some form, Mom is going to be spending the next four months holding and singing to my little one. I wouldn't be surprised if it came out already knowing all our lullabies.

### **21 Weeks...This little one is bopping! (2007-09-30 00:00)**

✕ Sept. 30: This sweet little baby is really moving around in my belly! I spent the weekend up in Northfield and St. Paul, and in the evenings while Maretta and I were watching movies, she could feel the little bumps coming from my tummy.

I think that this is the most calm and lovely part of a pregnancy. I can feel the sweet little baby, I'm feeling pregnant and growing but still small enough to be comfortable almost all the time. It's not hard to do anything yet. The sweet little baby bumps aren't uncomfortable, my pelvis isn't splitting...these are all really good things. I'd like it if this month could last a while. On the other hand, I want to meet our new little person, so let's keep the show on the road!

Update from BabyCenter.com - Week 21

How your baby's growing:

Your baby now weighs about three-quarters of a pound and is approximately 10 1/2 inches long. His eyebrows and eyelids are fully developed. And you can certainly feel him move. He's oblivious to your schedule, though, so don't be surprised if he starts working out just when you're settling down for the night.

## **3.10 October**

### **Week 22 - we're falling in love (2007-10-07 18:48)**

✕ Oct. 7: Time keeps going by. I haven't been on the computer much in the last week, and when I logged on this evening, I was shocked to see that I've reached the 22 week mark. The illustration for this week is a little weird looking. I know that the baby has very little fat, but this one looks a whole lot like ET:)

I had some fun recently looking at the posts that I had done during my pregnancy with Andrew. They're available at the very start of my blog or right here. So far, this pregnancy has been really, really easy. I'm feeling the baby moving a lot of the time, and I'm feeling very loving toward her. I love anticipating that the little person who is growing inside of me could grow to become one of my favorite people in the whole wide world. Pictures of the ultrasound and some exciting new baby clothes are in the gallery.

Here's the 22 week update from BabyCenter.com

How your baby's growing:

Your baby now looks like a miniature newborn, checking in at 10.9 inches and almost 1 pound. Her skin will continue to appear wrinkled until she gains enough weight to fill it out, and the fine hair (lanugo) that covers her head and body is now visible. Her lips are becoming more distinct, and the first signs of teeth are appearing as buds beneath her gum line. Her eyes are developed, though the iris (the colored part of the eye) still lacks pigment. Eyelids and eyebrows are in place, and her pancreas, essential for hormone production, is developing steadily.

**Busy times (2007-10-07 19:26)**



Oct. 7: It feels like our schedule has been really full these last weeks. Pictures are in the gallery.

Last weekend (Sept. 28-30), I was in Northfield and St. Paul for a Carleton Alumni Council meeting. It was so wonderful to be back on campus. I really love Carleton. I find just being in the liberal arts environment to be very invigorating. Bryan and Andrew had a nice time here at home. They got out of the house a lot. At one point, I got a text message from Bryan (we now have cell phones:) with an urgent question, "Been at library for 2hrs. How do I get him to leave??"

Andrew does indeed love spending time at the library. He bounces from reading books to putting puzzles together to playing with the wooden toys to climbing on the furniture to looking at the animal mural, and then he starts the cycle again!

Bryan's been taking a classical guitar class on Monday nights, so I've been inviting Terry over for dinner that night. It's a fun chance to see him and to have company/extra help with Andrew on what otherwise would be a quiet evening.

We're going to be heading back to Northfield for the Carleton Alumni Adventures committee meeting. Bryan and Andrew are going to hang out on campus while I'm in meetings. I'm sure they'll enjoy some Hogan Bros. hoagies. I'm hoping that we have the chance to pick apples at Fireside orchard. And then we're planning to spend some time with Maretta (and maybe Kyle) in St. Paul. Assuming that Andrew handles the drive alright, it should be a fun time:)


### Feeling fulfilled after a visit with Granny Lu and Grandad (2007-10-07 19:42)



Oct. 7: It's Sunday night, and Bryan and I are relaxing after a great weekend with Granny Lu and Grandad. Photos of the weekend are in the gallery. Bryan's mom came into town on Wednesday. I took the afternoon off, and the two of us had a fun time visiting and doing some shopping for the little baby-on-the-way. She stayed home with Andrew on Thursday and Friday. Bryan's dad was giving a speech in Minneapolis at the Certified Commercial Investment Members real estate symposium, and he drove down to Madison on Friday. We all enjoyed a lovely time together. I started working on a sweater for Andrew, and everyone else watched Andrew enough to let me make the whole back of the sweater over the weekend.

Our times together are pretty low-key. We went to the zoo and to playgrounds, but in general, we stuck pretty close to home, just enjoying each other's company.

### **Big news...Michael and Lisa are engaged!! (2007-10-07 19:59)**

 Oct. 7: I'm excited to share the news that Michael and Lisa have decided to get engaged. Lisa just posted the news on her blog. Michael stopped by to share the news earlier this week. He and Lisa have been dating for (I think) about four years. Michael said that they are looking at a fall 2009 wedding. Lisa, Michael, and their roommate, Alice, co-own a home together in Fitchburg. For those of you who don't know, Michael is a computer guy at Excel Inns, and Lisa works for American Family Insurance. We're really excited and happy for the two of them.

### **23 weeks - From a bump to a belly (2007-10-18 06:12)**

Oct. 18: This is such a lovely time in pregnancy. I think I'd be happy being this pregnant as a general state of being in life. I can feel the little one rolling and kicking and moving around, but the motions are generally soft and fluttery. She's feeling less like a pingpong ball in her movements this week. Her movements seems to be slowing down a little. Maybe she's finding that she's running out of room. Hard to believe that she's over a pound now:) My belly has rounded out in the last week or two. I no longer fit into any of my pre-pregnancy pants, and especially now that I'm wearing maternity shirts, I've had several people on the street comment on my pregnancy. It's a surprising time to have my pregnancy go from a secret I tell people to a fact that anyone I meet can know. Sleep has been good these days, and I haven't been particularly tired during the day. Plus I can still usually eat big meals, which I enjoy. I've gained about 10 pounds since July, but I lost around 8 pounds in May and June (early pregnancy loss of appetite), so while I'm feeling bigger, I'm not yet feeling heavy. But that's coming! I bought the cutest little shoes at a wonderful store in St. Paul called Peapod. They make me so very happy. That's the news for now!

23 Week Update from Babycenter.com

Your baby is more than 11 inches long and weighs just over a pound. His skin is red and wrinkled. Blood vessels in his lungs are developing to prepare him for breathing. He can swallow, but he normally won't pass his first stool (called meconium) until after birth. Loud noises heard often in utero — such as your dog barking or the roar of a vacuum cleaner — probably won't faze your baby when he hears them outside the womb.

### **Processing August experiences (2007-10-18 06:23)**

Oct. 18: Lots of people have lovingly been asking me how I've been doing as we adjust to life without Mom. In general, it's really not fun. I still worry most about the rest of my family and how they are all coping. And I feel so



deflated in the regular moments when I think to myself, "I should call Mom to..." Then I kind of frown and often feel a lump in my throat and then move on.

There's things I see or hear that so clearly remind me of times we've had together. I can see her and hear her and remember her so clearly, that it's painfully startling to re-realize that she's gone. Now it's just me holding the memories of the times we have had together. The other side of the "remember when" conversations is gone.

I've had so much fun picking out clothes and baby books and little things for this new baby. And Mom would have loved to be part of it. I feel so lucky to have a wonderful mother-in-law and sister to share these fun times with. And since they both knew and loved Mom, it helps me feel more like she's part of all this too.

All that said, on a daily basis, I don't spend much time feeling sad. I sometimes worry that I may be avoiding the grieving process altogether, but then I think that a lot of that took place for me over the summer and in some ways over the last couple years. And I know that Mom was really worried about me being too sad or stressed during this pregnancy. Maybe she gave me a mommy spoonful of heart-healing medicine when she left. Because for better or worse, while I miss her so much, I'm not holding a lot of sadness in my heart.

One thing that has been regularly coming to mind is the last weeks of Mom's life. At the time, we were all in a mode where we were doing what needed to get done. We were providing a lot of care and nursing for Mom, and I was trying really hard to be accepting of the place we were and of the place where we were heading. I'm so glad we had that time to help Mom let go and to say goodbye. But I am currently thinking back on those times and mixing that purposeful sense of gratitude with memories about how wrong, how horrible really, it is to watch your mother die.

I think back, and my heart constricts as I remember seeing sign after sign that her body was failing and that she was irrevocably slipping away from her vibrant living self.

I remember times in July that I just knew that things were really not right, and I so desperately wanted to find a way to fix them. Why didn't Mom want me to buy her a new, lighter purse. I couldn't know at the time it was because she was never going to leave the house again on her own.

I think of Mom lying on her hospital bed and seeing the bag that held her urine turn darker and darker as her kidneys shut down. At the time, I tried to just enjoy having her near me and being in her presence. But now I think back on that image, and my soul shouts, "NO!" My mom's kidneys are NOT supposed to shut down. That means that all the toxins are staying in her body and destroying her brain and meaning that she can never, never come back to us and be herself again.

...

Those last weeks had a whole lot of goodness to them. But this month, as I continue to get used to the idea that Mom the person is gone, I'm also thinking back and working to come to terms with the hard parts of letting her go.

The up-side is that I still feel her all around me all the time.

Those are my thoughts for now.

Althea

## Andrew is singing (2007-10-18 07:01)

Oct. 18: Andrew spends much of his time singing. Favorites are The Farmer in the Dell, Old McDonald, and ABCs. He also loves counting. Not that he's accurately identifying how many of anything he sees. He just likes to say the numbers. "One, two, three, four, five." Counting things on his plate or trees we pass along the road. Then he counts up to "twenty-teen" just for fun.

This morning, he wanted to get back in his crib and read books while I took a shower. When I came out, he was looking at one of his books, and singing Old McDonald about the animals on each of the pages. "Ollld McDonald had an aardvark. EE II EEE III OOOO." "Old McDonald had a monster, with a grrr here and a grrr there..." That kid is just so fun!

We were in Northfield and St. Paul last weekend for a Carleton alumni committee I serve on and to visit Aunt Mareta and Uncle Kyle. Andrew and Bryan had a fun time hanging out together, and Andrew just kept turning on the charm. He's at such a fun age.

When I brought him his toast for breakfast this morning, I said, "I cut it into four squares for you, Andrew." And he replied, "OH Thank you, Mommy. Squares! Oh my gosh!"

**Dandy's health is failing (2007-10-18 07:18)**



Oct. 18: I really wish that I wasn't writing this post. Bryan's grandpa, Dandy, moved from the hospital to a Hospice center in Wichita yesterday. Bryan, his sister, and his parents have plans to meet in Kansas on Friday to spend time with Dandy and with Grandma Jo and to be there to support each other.

Dandy is such a wonderful, generous, full-of-life person, and it's hard to know that he and Grandma Jo and Bryan's dad are in a position where they are having to say goodbye. My heart is with them. In fact most of my thoughts are with them too.

Bryan's dad is an only child, and they are all so close. I feel like it must somehow be harder when there are less people to carry the burdens, to support and remember together.

Dandy was so happy to see and hear about Andrew. Andy and Dandy he would say. I would really like to take Andrew down to give Dandy another opportunity to see him, but it seems like this weekend is probably a better time for Bryan to be able to go down and support his dad and grandma as an adult rather than as a parent-trailing-a-toddler. I feel so very lucky to have married into a family that is filled with such wonderful people. My world is better (immeasurably so!) because of the family that Dandy helped to raise.

### **Dandy has left us (2007-10-18 18:23)**

Oct. 18: Sad news to report tonight. We got a call from Bryan's mom around supper time that Bryan's grandpa, Dandy, has passed away. It feels really strange to think that he is gone. Bryan is flying out to Wichita tomorrow afternoon. Things feel all off-kilter here.

### **Dandy's Obituary (2007-10-20 06:49)**



Dotzour, G. Gordon, 83, prominent realtor of West Wichita and owner of Dotzour Realtors, died Thursday, October 18, 2007.

Service, 1:00 P.M., Monday, October 22, First Presbyterian Church. Graveside service will follow at 4:00 P.M., Resthaven Cemetery. Viewing, 4:00-9:00 P.M., Saturday, October 20 and 1:00-9:00 P.M., Sunday, October 21, Downing & Lahey Mortuary West.

Gordon Dotzour was born on January 28, 1924 to Grover and Jennie Dotzour. He grew up in Riverside and attended North High School where his father, Grover, was the first principal.

Gordon played on the Redskin 2-man and 4-man State Championship golf team in 1940. Gordon attended Wichita State for a semester where he played clarinet with the Jazz Band. He enlisted in the Army Air Force. After his discharge he finished his BA degree at Stanford and played on the Stanford golf team which won the National Championship that year.

He returned to Kansas and took a job at the bank in Macksville where he met Betty Jo Cotton. They were married in 1947 after a short courtship.

Gordon took a job with Sheaffer Pen Co and then returned to his love of golf as an Assistant Pro at McDonald Park Golf Course working with Tex Consolver and Dean Adkisson. During those years, Gordon, Tex and another Wichita pro, Gene O'Brien, played on the Tour of the PGA.

Gordon then went into the real estate business with Luis and Tony Casado.

Under their tutelage he learned the Real Estate business and opened his own business, Dotzour Realtors, with an office on West Douglas. He later built his offices at 9100 W. Central. While in the Real Estate business Gordon promoted West Wichita. He laid the groundwork for the first bank in West Wichita, the National Bank of Wichita and was one of the first directors. He published The Westerner, a weekly area newspaper, and was on the Wichita Park Board when Pawnee Prairie Golf Course was built. After many years of promoting the area he was often referred to as the "Mayor" of West Wichita.

Gordon and his son, Mark, developed the Gleneagles Addition in west Wichita. Gordon retired in 1982 from business after health problems and returned to playing golf at Rolling Hills and enjoying life with his wife, son and

grandchildren.

Survivors, wife, Betty Jo; son and daughter-in-law, Mark and LuAnn of College Station, TX; grandchildren and their spouses, Bryan and Althea Dotzour, Melanie and Ben Davis; great-grandson, Andrew Dotzour.

Memorials established with First Presbyterian Church, 525 N. Broadway, Wichita, KS 67214 and Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice, 313 S. Market, Wichita, KS 67202. Tributes may be sent to the family via [www.dlwichita.com](http://www.dlwichita.com).

Published in the Wichita Eagle from 10/20/2007 - 10/22/2007.

### **Soon to be plugged back in... (2007-10-23 06:34)**

Oct. 23: It's a chilly, sunny, hopefully gorgeous October morning. Bryan's been in Kansas for the last four days. He's returning home this afternoon. Andrew and I have had a great time together. I pulled out the wooden train set from my parent's basement, and Andrew had an absolute blast playing with it last night and this morning. Made it very difficult to leave the house in fact.

These days when I pull Andrew out of his crib, he says, "In the big bed." So we get back in my bed and cuddle under the covers for a few minutes. Then Andrew plays with my alarm clock/CD player. It has the James Gallway CD in it, and Andrew likes saying, "I hear a flute. I hear a violin."

Terry came over for supper last night, and Andrew dressed up in his lion Halloween costume for him. Andrew was having a good time putting on the mane and roaring. Terry would grab the tail, and Andrew would quickly get away. Such a cutie.

My sweet husband is bringing our laptop home with him, so I'll look forward to getting re-plugged in in the evenings. I did some knitting while watching Anne of Green Gables last night, and I found I didn't miss my late night computer time at all.

Dandy's funeral was yesterday. Sounds like it was a very full day, but the times I spoke to Bryan, he sounded up-beat. I think they did a good job of sending Dandy off.

That's the update for now!

## Teeny tiny baby sister update (2007-10-24 17:34)



Oct. 24: I really like being pregnant. And this is such a sweet little person whom I'm carrying around. I'm completely smitten with her.

A couple weeks ago I had my first appointment with my new midwife. When Bryan changed jobs, our insurance changed, so now I will be seeing the UW Midwives. I'm really excited to be working with midwives. I've heard only good things from the people I know who have had the pleasure of having their assistance.

My next appointment isn't until 28 weeks. I normally would be going every four weeks, but I'm supposed to have the fabulous glucose test at 28 weeks, and my midwife said that for a normal second pregnancy she doesn't feel like it's really necessary to see patients every four weeks. So there will be a six-week gap between this set of appointments. My next appointment and glucose test (to check for diabetes) is scheduled for November 19.

### BabyCenter.com Week 24 Update

Your baby's growing steadily, gaining about a quarter of a pound since last week, when she was just over a pound. Since she's almost a foot long, that makes a pretty lean figure, but her body is filling out proportionally and she'll soon put on more baby fat. Your baby's skin is thin, translucent, and wrinkled, her brain is growing rapidly, and her taste buds are developing. Her lungs are developing "branches" of the respiratory "tree" and cells that produce surfactant, a substance that helps the air sacs inflate easily.



Tell me a story! (2007-10-24 17:48)



Oct. 24: Andrew is so completely consumed with the telling of stories...it's kind of amazing. Common refrains are, "Tell me story 'bout ANDREW." or "Tell me story 'bout us!" or "Tell story 'bout A BEAR." Mid-story, he often asks, "Then who comes??" He likes it best when some animal shows up mid-story. For example, I'll be in the midst of a pretty good story about a little curly-haired boy named Andy who was solving a mystery at the grocery store when Andrew will ask, "Then who comes?" He'll ask repeatedly until I say something along the lines of, "Well, then a walrus came around the grocery aisle and said, 'Hello Andy!'"

That kid is a crack-up. Photos from the last couple weeks including some great pics of Andrew in his Halloween costume made specially for Andrew by his Granny Lu are in the gallery.

## 25 weeks: She's getting stronger (2007-10-28 19:07)

✕ Oct. 28: The little baby is getting bigger and stronger. She's moving around less frequently, but more strongly. Sometimes she'll shift or kick or turn, and I'll gasp in surprise or slight shock. Last week I got a wonderful delivery from the UPS man with some additional new clothes for the little one. Oh, they are SO CUTE! I plan to take more pictures soon.

This week I've started to notice that my stomach capacity is decreasing. I think that as the baby continues to move north that I'm often running out of room part-way through my plate. In general, though, I'm still in a really comfortable part of pregnancy. I love my sweet belly!

BabyCenter.com week 25 update

How your baby's growing:

Head to heels, your baby now measures about 13 1/2 inches. His weight — a pound and a half — isn't much more than an average rutabaga, but he's beginning to exchange his long, lean look for some baby fat. As he does, his wrinkled skin will begin to smooth out and he'll start to look more and more like a newborn. His hair is probably recognizable now (in color and texture), although both may change after he's born.

## Weekend in Austin (2007-10-28 19:43)



Oct. 28: I just got back home from a wonderful weekend in Austin with some of my good friends from graduate school. Kathy, Jennifer, Lara, Grace, and I met in Austin (approximately equidistant from our homes in Washington DC, California, and Wisconsin) on Friday. We ate lots of good food, enjoyed exploring some of the great places that Austin has to offer, and generally relaxed and enjoyed spending time with good friends. Pictures of our weekend are in the gallery. Many thanks to Bryan for encouraging me to go and for taking such good care of Andrew while I was off having fun!

We started our weekend on Friday. The five of us met at the airport and headed for a late lunch at Cheuy's on Barton Springs Road. From there, we drove around Zilker Park and had a really nice walk around the Zilker Botanical Gardens. I especially liked the oriental garden section with all the beautiful water features. We headed up to our hotel up at the arboretum where we found ourselves all changed (mostly unintentionally) into black shirts and jeans before heading out to dinner. Our plan was to eat at Guero's Taco Bar on South Congress, but there was a two-hour wait (it was the weekend of the Nebraska/Texas football game). After realizing that none of us were really all that hungry, we decided to have ice cream instead of dinner. MMMmmm Amy's ice cream! We all went to the flagship Whole Foods Market in downtown Austin where we were amazed and overwhelmed by the array of products and food they had to offer. Fortified with water and snacks, we drove up to Highland Mall where we waited for a long time to scare ourselves silly at the House of Torment. Kathy was the bravest amongst us. She went first, then me, then Jennifer, Grace, and Lara. I was scared silly most of the way. In fact, there's no way I would have made it through had I not had Kathy and Jennifer to hang on to. It was the first haunted house I've been through in a loooong time, and it was a lot of fun. My throat hurt from screaming:)

On Saturday, we started the day by going out to breakfast at Magnolia Cafe on Lake Austin Blvd. Then we spent several hours shopping near the Whole Foods store, exploring a book store, some artsy boutiques, and found some good tunes to buy at Waterloo Records. Needing a break from shopping, we drove back down to Zilker Park and got in our swim suits for a dip in Barton Springs Pool, a spring-fed, natural-bottom, chilly pool. Kathy, Jennifer, and Lara swam the whole length, and afterwards, we warmed up in the sunny afternoon and had a picnic under the trees.

We spent the late afternoon exploring 6th Street including the historic Driskill Hotel. We all found some earrings to buy at one of the cool shops downtown. While we had plans to watch the bats emerge from beneath the Congress Street Bridge, we heard that they had mostly already migrated down to Mexico. So instead we headed out of town to the Salt Lick BBQ. Our drive through hill country with the sun setting (and then on the way back with a nearly-full moon) was just lovely. And the dinner was amazing!

After getting a bit lost, we found our way to Mount Barnell, where we could see the river and some of the lights of Austin. Back at the hotel, we stayed up late talking and looking at Bride's magazines for Jennifer.

Lara and Jennifer had to leave early on Sunday, so we took them to the airport at 8, then went to breakfast (pumpkin pancakes...mmm) and window shopped before heading back to the airport ourselves. So that's our weekend in a nutshell. It was so fun to fly to a fun city and see good friends. I really had a great time. And then it was so lovely to come home to my two boys. Andrew told me that "I'm a little bit sad. And a little bit happy." And now, I'm off to bed!

**Sad news: my grandpa passed away (2007-10-31 06:53)**



Oct. 31: It's just not a good month for our paternal grandparents. Or who knows, maybe from their perspective, ending long and rich lives, it is a good month. In any case, I'm sad to report that I got a call from my dad last night letting us know that his dad had died that evening. Dad and Grandma were both with him, and actually, when they talked to me, they were still sitting with him.

Grandpa moved to a nursing home last year and has been in and out of the hospital as he has struggled with emphysema and resulting serious lung and breathing problems. Dad has been traveling down to Monroe one or more times each week for the last several years to help with things and to share their company. I'm sure that without his yeoman's work that things would have progressed long ago.

Aunt Julie has a large set of pictures of Grandpa and Grandma scanned in on her website. Some of my favorites are Michael and Grandpa, Grandpa with his ice cream truck, my wedding with Grandpa and Grandma, and then just a nice picture of Grandpa looking like himself.

Also, here's a couple early pictures of Andrew and Grandpa (spring 2006) (summer 2005). A draft obituary follows below.

**Grandpa's draft obituary**

MONROE - Myron "Mike" Jacob Babler, 85, died on October 30, 2007, after a long battle with emphysema. He spent much of the last year of his life at the Monroe Manor, where he continued to enjoy good conversations with his family, friends, and the Manor staff—and keep tabs on sports, local news, and world events via television.

Myron was born on December 19, 1921, in Deaconess Hospital in Monroe, Wisconsin, to Jacob Lee and Emma Frederica (nee Feldt) Babler. He grew up in Monroe and for a while on a farm outside of Monroe. He was a 1939

graduate of Monroe High School.

He met the love of his life, Lucille Evelyn Krueger, in April 1941, and, unable to wait for Christmas, proposed marriage to her (coincidentally) shortly before Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941.

They were married on April 18, 1942. After only three short months, in July 1942, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He did not return home for good until September 1945. During his time in the army, he landed on Omaha Beach's Easy Green in the Normandy invasion on the morning of June 7, 1944, (D-Day +1) as part of the 457th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, 29th Division of General Omar Bradley's 1st Army. Later he became part of General George Patton's 3rd Army and the 90th Infantry Division and fought as an infantryman in the Battle of the Bulge. He was awarded three Purple Hearts during his service in that battle, one for a bullet grazing his face, another for being hit by shrapnel, and a third for having frozen his hands and feet. One time, at considerable personal risk, he and a buddy decided to aid a severely wounded German soldier whose plight they felt was genuine—despite the fact that they knew the Nazis sometimes used this as a trick to kill Americans. His children, proud of the role that their dad played as part of the “greatest generation,” wrote his war memories in a booklet entitled “So That We Live Free, Myron J. Babler: His Experiences as a Soldier During World War II as Told to His Children.”

After returning home to his beloved wife, the couple made their home in Monroe. Myron went to work in a cheese factory near downtown, and after having walked across the street one day to Goodmiller's Ice Cream Co. for an ice cream bar, his career path was changed forever. While chatting with the owner, he was offered a job selling ice cream to farmers and folks living in the rural stateline area. He took the job, and after nine years, Schwan's ice cream and frozen foods company of Marshall, Minnesota, bought out Goodmiller's.

Myron was personally hired by Marv Schwan, the company's founder, and became the company's first sales representative in Wisconsin. He stayed with the company another 29 1/2 years and became the “ice cream man” that generations of children and adults in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois welcomed into their homes and hearts. He loved the entire region, working its byways through the changing seasons, monitoring agricultural crops, enjoying the landscape, riding its hills and curves, and knowing its changing skies. He loved its people, knowing who they were, how they were doing, learning their dreams, watching their kids arrive and grow, and hearing about both their troubles and triumphs. He loved being part of the Schwan's family and being in a job that brought smiles. He retired at age 67.

Myron's 65 happy years of marriage included raising a family of four, three sons and a daughter. It also included many years of being close with his parents, who lived in Monroe. His children remember his love, his pride in his family, his support of each of them, how hard he worked to provide for them, his humor, his hugs, how he respected people, and how they respected and knew him.

Beyond his work with Schwan's, Myron loved his musical life, which began with the violin (his idea) and expanded as a young man with his group, Mike's Knights, playing for crowds in small towns throughout the area—and even one time on WLS in Chicago. He enjoyed jamming with friends on his accordion. He later entertained hundreds of area residents and visitors by playing the organ and piano on Friday and Saturday nights at several local establishments, including Marco's in Monroe, The Swiss Wheel in Monroe (including playing earlier the same night that a fire destroyed the building), and The Chalet in Brodhead. Another side business for him was selling pianos and organs, often to people who enjoyed listening to him play music on the weekends.

After retiring, Myron was a devoted fan and attendee of both the boys and girls sports teams at the Monroe High School. He also closely followed the Wisconsin Badger and Green Bay Packer games.

He loved Monroe; Cheese Days; the Green County Fair; attending mass at St. Victor's Church; visits with his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; talking with people; taking naps on Sunday afternoons; sitting on the porch to watch the traffic go by on busy 16th Street; listening to many kinds of music, including Swiss music; playing the piano, organ, and accordion; watching Laurel and Hardy movies; watching travel shows and



learning about distant places; visiting his brother in New Glarus and Monticello and his sister in Oshkosh; limburger cheese; eating chocolate (including having two Oreo cookies each morning with breakfast); taking long drives around town and driving around the courthouse square; going out for a beer; and watching the greyhound races in Dubuque.

Myron is survived by his wife Lucille and their four children: Kim Babler of Madison; Gary Babler of Stoughton; Scott (Marcia) Babler of Libertyville, Illinois; and Julie (Kevin) of California. He is also survived by his older sister, Phyllis Drews, of O'Fallon, Missouri; seven grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren (his ninth great-grandchild is expected in February).

He was preceded in death by his father, Jacob, on December 28, 1970; his mother, Emma, on February 12, 1979; his younger brother, Duane, on April 10, 2001; and his daughter-in-law Margot (nee Davis) Babler on August 31, 2007.

### Halloween pictures (2007-10-31 20:10)



Oct. 31: I think that Andrew really got into the whole costume and trick-or-treating aspects of Halloween this year. He loved dressing up in the adorable lion costume that Granny Lu made for him, roaring and eating antelope all day long. Tonight, he surprised us by racing up to peoples' doors, knocking and ringing the doorbell, and calling out "Happy Halloween!" He ate quite a bit of candy before we got back home, and I think he's probably going to want to go out again tomorrow:)

Pictures from the last few days are in the gallery including some great pictures of Andrew playing in the leaves,



pictures from our Happy Bambino Halloween party, and pictures of trick-or-treating with Alivia tonight.

## 3.11 November

### Details on Grandpa's funeral (2007-11-01 06:18)

The details for Grandpa's funeral have been set. An updated obituary follows below. It's also available online from the Monroe Times.

#### Visitation

The visitation will take place on Monday, November 5, 2007, at Newcomer Funeral Home in Monroe from 5-7 p.m., with a prayer service at 7 p.m. Newcomer Funeral Home is located at 1329 31st Avenue, Monroe, 608.325.4634.

#### Funeral

The funeral will be on Tuesday, November 6, at 10:30 a.m. at St. Victor's Catholic Church in Monroe. The church's address is 1760 14th Street, Monroe, 608.325.9506, [www.stvictormonroe.org](http://www.stvictormonroe.org). A luncheon will be served afterwards downstairs in the church. After the luncheon, at 1 p.m., we will proceed to the cemetery for a service at the grave site.

MONROE – Myron “Mike” Jacob Babler, 85, died peacefully on October 30, 2007, after a long battle with emphysema. He spent much of the last year of his life at the Monroe Manor, where he continued to enjoy good conversations with his family, friends, and the Manor staff—and keep tabs on sports, local news, and world events via television.

Myron was born on December 19, 1921, in Deaconess Hospital in Monroe, Wisconsin, to Jacob Lee and Emma Frederica (nee Feldt) Babler. He grew up in Monroe and for a while on a farm outside of Monroe. He was a 1939 graduate of Monroe High School.

He met the love of his life, Lucille Evelyn Krueger, in April 1941, and, unable to wait for Christmas, proposed marriage to her (coincidentally) shortly before Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941. They were married on April 18, 1942. After only three short months, in July 1942, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He did not return home for good until September 1945. During his time in the army, he landed on Omaha Beach's Easy Green in the Normandy invasion on the morning of June 7, 1944, (D-Day +1) as part of the 457th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, 29th Division of General Omar Bradley's 1st Army. Later he became part of General George Patton's 3rd Army and the 90th Infantry Division and fought as an infantryman in the Battle of the Bulge. He was awarded three Purple Hearts during his service in that battle, one for a bullet grazing his face, another for being hit by shrapnel, and a third for having frozen his hands and feet. One time, at considerable personal risk, he and a buddy decided to aid a severely wounded German soldier whose plight they felt was genuine—despite the fact that they knew the Nazis sometimes used this as a trick to kill Americans. His children, proud of the role that their dad played as part of the “greatest generation,” wrote his war memories in a booklet entitled “So That We Live Free, Myron J. Babler: His Experiences as a Soldier During World War II as Told to His Children.”

After returning home to his beloved wife, the couple made their home in Monroe. Myron went to work in a cheese factory near downtown, and after having walked across the street one day to Goodmiller's Ice Cream Co. for an ice cream bar, his career path was changed forever. While chatting with the owner, he was offered a job selling ice cream to farmers and folks living in the rural stateline area. He took the job, and after nine years, Schwan's ice cream and frozen foods company of Marshall, Minnesota, bought out Goodmiller's. Myron was personally hired by Marv Schwan, the company's founder, and became the company's first sales representative in Wisconsin. He stayed with the company another 29 1/2 years and became the “ice cream man” that generations of children and adults in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois welcomed into their homes and hearts. He loved the entire region, working its byways through the changing seasons, monitoring agricultural crops, enjoying the landscape, riding its hills and curves, and knowing its changing skies. He loved its people, knowing who they were, how they were doing, learning their dreams, watching their kids arrive and grow, and hearing about both their troubles and triumphs. He loved being part of the Schwan's family and being in a job that brought smiles. He retired at age 67.

Myron's 65 happy years of marriage included raising a family of four, three sons and a daughter. It also included many years of being close with his parents, who lived in Monroe. His children remember his love, his pride in his family, his support of each of them, how hard he worked to provide for them, his humor, his hugs, how he respected people, and how they respected and knew him.

Beyond his work with Schwan's, Myron loved his musical life, which began with the violin (his idea) and expanded as a young man with his group, Mike's Knights, playing for crowds in small towns throughout the area—and even one time on WLS in Chicago. He enjoyed jamming with friends on his accordion. He later entertained hundreds of area residents and visitors by playing the organ and piano on Friday and Saturday nights at several local establishments, including Marco's in Monroe, The Swiss Wheel in Monroe (including playing earlier the same night that a fire destroyed the building), and The Chalet in Brodhead. He played instruments entirely by ear, and often sat down at the piano to immerse himself in the pure joy of playing his music. Another side business for him was selling pianos and organs, often to people who enjoyed listening to him play music on the weekends.

After retiring, Myron was a devoted fan and attendee of both the boys and girls sports teams at the Monroe High School. He also closely followed the Wisconsin Badger and Green Bay Packer games.

Myron was a very kind man and almost always had a smile on his face. He had a warm glow about him, always saw the good in people, and a generally positive disposition about the world around him. He loved Monroe; Cheese Days; the Green County Fair; attending mass at St. Victor's Church; visits with his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; talking with people; taking naps on Sunday afternoons; sitting on the porch to watch the traffic go by on busy 16th Street; listening to many kinds of music, including Swiss music; playing the piano, organ, and accordion; watching Laurel and Hardy movies; watching travel shows and learning about distant places; making popcorn at 10:30 p.m.; visiting his brother in New Glarus and Monticello and his sister in Oshkosh; the old "City Box" (now the Suisse Haus); Baumgartner's limburger cheese; enjoying a bowlful of Schwan's ice cream; eating chocolate (including having two Oreo cookies each morning with breakfast); taking long drives around town and driving around the courthouse square; going out for a beer; and watching the greyhound races in Dubuque.

Myron is survived by his wife Lucille and their four children: Kim Babler of Madison; Gary Babler of Stoughton; Scott (Marcia) Babler of Libertyville, Illinois; and Julie (Kevin) Prime of Petaluma, California. He is also survived by his older sister, Phyllis Drews, of O'Fallon, Missouri; seven grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren (his ninth great-grandchild is expected in February).

He was preceded in death by his father, Jacob, on December 28, 1970; his mother, Emma, on February 12, 1979; his younger brother, Duane, on April 10, 2001; and his daughter-in-law Margot (nee Davis) Babler on August 31, 2007. A

visitation will take place on Monday, November 5, 2007, at Newcomer Funeral Home in Monroe from 5–7 p.m., with a prayer service at 7 p.m. The family also invites you to a funeral to celebrate his life on Tuesday, November 6, at 10:30 a.m. at St. Victor's Catholic Church in Monroe. Memorials may be made to the Apostolate to the Handicapped.

### **Dancing Daisy (2007-11-03 12:23)**

**X** Nov. 3: I can't believe that the little one is putting on weight so quickly. According to BabyCenter, she's added a half pound in the last few wees, now weighing in at about a pound and two thirds. I'm reaching the end of the lovely second trimester, and all is calm and easy. My belly is starting to poke out more, causing me to grunt a big while bending over to pick things up off the floor, but I'm still nearly completely comfortable. While I raked the lawn yesterday, the little one- either excited or unhappy with my activity-was dancing up a storm. She's generally pretty quiet, but when she has one of her active cycles, holy cow! It's starting to take my breath away! What a glorious time of year this is for me and my belly:)

BabyCenter.com 26 week update

How your baby's growing:

Your baby now weighs about a pound and two-thirds and measures 14 inches (an English hothouse cucumber), from head to heel. The nerve pathways in her ears are developing, which means her response to sounds is growing more consistent. Her lungs are developing now, too, as she continues to take small breaths of amniotic fluid — good practice for when she's born and takes that first breath of air.

**Big boy bed (2007-11-04 19:15)**



Nov. 4: We had a nice weekend, which is now drawing to a close. Dad seemed to have all Grandpa's funeral arrangements in hand, so we were left to our own devices. Yesterday, amidst periods of playing in the leaves, we took a walk out at Cherokee Marsh. Andrew was so beautiful running along the paths in the fall light. After our walk, we went over to Dennis Drive to pick up a big-boy bed for Andrew. Maretta donated the bottom bunk of her/our trundle bed for her nephew. Saturday afternoon, we took down the crib (sniff) and set up a bed in its place. Since then, Andrew's been incredibly enamored with his big boy bed. He tucks himself in and pretends to sleep for long stretches at a time. The first couple sleeps in his new bed have gone well. Bryan went to check on him last night after he'd been in bed for almost an hour. He found Andrew with his quilt pulled up to his chin and his eyes wide open. He was happy enough, but probably too full of processing thoughts to sleep. Pictures of our Cherokee walk and of the new bed are in the gallery.

Jessica's baby arrived (2007-11-06 16:25)



Nov. 6: I just got a phone message from my friend Jessica, and she told me that her sweet baby girl was born this morning. Celia Corrina-Jane Klabough was born today at 10:45 AM. Celia was 8 lbs 8 oz, 20 inches long and has a full head of black hair. What wonderful news! Eli is a big brother:)



**Grandpa's funeral (2007-11-06 16:57)**



Nov. 6: We're back home after spending the day in Monroe for my grandpa's funeral. Michael, Lisa, Maretta, Kyle, Bryan, and I drove down this morning amidst some windy, chilly November weather. The sun shone on and off through the day, and the wind made the weather rather nippy.

Grandpa's funeral was really nice. The priest who did the service has known Grandma and Grandpa for 35 years, and his homily focused on five of the things that were important and special about Grandpa: his faith, his family, his work, his military service, and his personality (including his musical talents). He also said some really nice things about Grandma and the wonderful person who she is.

After the funeral, we ate a yummy luncheon where we got an opportunity to talk to some of our relatives. A contingent of us then traveled out to the cemetery for a burial that included a military honor guard. The sun came out to warm us at just the right moments, and a lone bugle played taps as a lovely end to the service.

We went to Grandma's for some Oreos and conversation before heading back to Madison. Photos of the visitation on Monday night and of the events of the day are in the gallery.

### **Sharing the stories told at Mom's funeral (2007-11-07 09:34)**

Nov. 7: Today is the two-month anniversary of my mom's funeral. It's been an odd journey these past couple months. There's a lot of sadness, a lot of normalness, a lot of happiness, and a lot of trepidation about how we all move forward. The second half of Mom's funeral gave people a chance to come up and say something about my mom. The speakers have generously shared their comments with me so I could post them more broadly. Here they are: Dad, Mary Read (mom's friend from childhood), Nancy McElmurry (mom's friend from when I was little), Paula Kopp (mom's cousin), Heather Lerner (my friend and one of mom's adopted children), and Terry.

### **Readings from Hospice (2007-11-07 13:32)**

The following responsive readings are from Hospice and suggested for for reciting during gatherings to honor those you have lost.

We Give Thanks

We give thanks.

For the memories that we treasure  
because of her,  
We give thanks.

For the good that she shaped in us,

We give thanks

For the enjoyment and growth that they called forth in  
us,  
We give thanks.

If there is any last  
word we need to say to her,  
In the silence of this moment we say it  
now.

In the silence we let her go from us,  
While we will hold dear her memory.

Mercy beyond our imagining,  
In gratitude for all good

gifts around us,  
We embrace life and all our days.

## We Remember Her

At the rising of the sun and in its going down,  
We  
remember her.  
At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,

We remember her.  
At the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring,

We remember her.  
At the shining of the sun and the warmth of summer,

We remember her.  
At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of  
autumn,

We remember her.  
At the beginning of the year and at its end,

We remember her. As long as we live, she too will live;  
For she is now a part of us,  
As we remember her.

When we are weary and in need of  
strength,

We remember her.

When we are lost and sick at heart,

We

remember her.

When we have joy we crave to share,

We remember her.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make  
We remember her.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs,  
We remember her.

As long as we live, she too will live;

For she is now a part of us,

As we remember her.

**Our full days (2007-11-17 15:53)**



Nov. 17: Andrew is taking an extra-long nap this afternoon, which is good, because I think the little guy's cold has gone from mild to more severe. He woke up crying several times with a bad cough. I wish there was something I could do for him.

Bryan's out of town this weekend at a conference for work, so Andrew and I have been spending our time enjoying some productive time at home. Michael and Lisa came over this morning, and while Michael watched Andrew, Lisa and I did a big shopping trip for all the items we'll need for our Thanksgiving dinner.

We're having about 15 people over to Terry's house on Thursday. Lisa is making spanakopita, and I'm going to work on the other elements with the help of Michael and Joe on Wednesday. This year we've ordered a smoked

turkey from Texas. Something new. Other than that, the menu is pretty traditional. It's possible that both our grandmas will join us for the day.

Last weekend, Bryan, Andrew, and I drove down to Janesville to see Mum (my mom's mom) for lunch. Mum moved to a new assisted living home last month, so we got to see her nice new place and enjoy a meal together. Pictures of Mum's new digs are in the gallery. Last weekend, we also planted most of the bulbs that my good friends gave me when Mom died. I'm hoping for a big display of tulips and daffodils next spring.

On Monday last week, we went to a baby celebration for one of my old co-workers who is expecting a baby in January. Clara, Alex, and Andrew had fun playing together, and it was fun to be one of the mamas-with-bellies at the event.

I've been spending some of my evenings typing up Mom's recipes for a cook-book that I'm hoping to have ready by Christmas. I've also been working on pulling together Christmas cards from the Babler family and from myself. And I have this silly idea that we should finish up with sanding, priming, and painting the bathroom at some point. So these days, I feel like my evenings have been full but productive. I've been working on a sweater for Andrew, and it's slowly coming along. I think I have a finished-by-Christmas goal for that one too.

That's the news for now! Happy Thanksgiving preparations:)

### **My little cabbage (mon petit chou) (2007-11-17 16:02)**

Nov. 17: She's getting so big! I've definitely got a belly. My winter coat is starting to strain, and it won't be long until I'm switching over to Bryan's jackets. The little one actually woke me up the other night with her activity, and she's made me gasp out loud when she gives an unexpected kick. My 28 week appointment is next Tuesday. Glucose testing time!

#### **28 week update**

By this week, your baby weighs two and a quarter pounds (like a Chinese cabbage) and measures 14.8 inches from the top of her head to her heels. She can blink her eyes, which now sport lashes. With her eyesight developing, she may be able to see the light that filters in through your womb. She's also developing billions of neurons in her brain and adding more body fat in preparation for life in the outside world.

#### **27 week update**

This week your baby weighs almost 2 pounds (like a head of cauliflower) and is about 14.4 inches long with his legs extended. He can now open and close his eyes, and he sleeps and wakes at regular intervals. He may suck his fingers, and although his lungs are still immature, they would be capable of functioning — with assistance — if he were to be born prematurely. Chalk up any rhythmic movement you may be feeling to a case of baby hiccups, which may be common from now on. Each episode usually lasts only a few moments, and isn't bothersome to him, so enjoy the tickle. With more brain tissue developing, your baby's brain is very active now. Wonder what he's thinking?

## 29 Week update - What a belly! (2007-11-24 14:55)

✕ Nov. 24: This pregnancy is going so easily. I really enjoy being pregnant:) The little one (now the size of a butternut squash!) is sometimes very active and sometimes really quiet. When she is turned in the right direction, you can feel her head or butt or back pretty clearly. Sometimes she seems to be tapping out a little rhythm that I only notice if I'm sitting quietly.

Andrew has been roll-playing baby all the time. He likes to be carried like a baby, and he sometimes likes to do baby talk. Recently, he's started saying, "Now I'm a baby. Now I'm big Andrew!"

I've done some more shopping for this new baby. Knowing how quickly they grow, and finding it therapeutic as I miss Mom, I've had fun continuing to build the little ones' wardrobe. I added pictures in the gallery.

BabyCenter.com week 29 update

Your baby now weighs about 2 1/2 pounds (like a butternut squash) and is a tad over 15 inches long from head to heel. His muscles and lungs are continuing to mature, and his head is growing bigger to make room for his developing brain. To meet his increasing nutritional demands, you'll need plenty of protein, vitamins C, folic acid, and iron. And because his bones are soaking up lots of calcium, be sure to drink your milk (or find another good source of calcium, such as cheese, yogurt, or enriched orange juice). This trimester, about 250 milligrams of calcium are deposited in your baby's hardening skeleton each day.



## Thanksgiving Recap (2007-11-24 15:19)



Nov. 24: Ahhh, a quiet day to take a deep breath and look back on the last week. Our Thanksgiving turned out pretty well. I was kind of expecting it to be "not-bad" if all went well, but I would actually say that it was a pretty nice day. It's been hard to approach the holidays with Mom being gone. Michael and I planned out Joe came home from Bowdoin on Tuesday night. It was his first time back home since September. Joe, Michael, Becky, and Lisa came over on Wednesday, and we made pies and prepped items so everything was ready to go for Thursday morning. Mareta and Kyle drove in through the snow on Wednesday night. On Sunday morning, Mareta watched Andrew while Bryan drove to Janesville to get Mum and I wrapped up most of the rest of the meal. We headed to Terry's house around 11:30 where we used his multiple ovens and warming ovens to get the meal ready for a 1:15 dinner. Pictures of the day are in the gallery.

We had a group of fourteen for our Thanksgiving meal: Terry, Tom, Terry's neighbor, Connie Maxwell, Nancy Thurow, Mum, Dad, Bryan, Andrew, myself, Michael, Lisa, Mareta, Kyle, and Joe. Our menu was smoked turkey from Greensburg, Texas, spanikopita made by Lisa, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, rolls, green beans, pink salad, pumpkin pie, pecan pie, and Grandma's turkey (sugar) cookies.

After dinner, Andrew went down for his nap really nicely, Dad did a massive dish-cleaning job, and we all attempted to digest. Dad headed to Monroe in the evening to take a Thanksgiving supper to Grandma and uncle Gary. The boys (Bryan, Michael, Joe, and Kyle) broke out the poker set, and they had fun playing together well into the evening.

On Friday morning, we gathered together again for a day-trip to Chicago. Eleven of us made the trip: Terry,

Connie, Bryan, Andrew, myself, Michael, Lisa, Maretta, Kyle, Joe, and Becky. We drove down to The historic Women's Athletic Club in downtown Chicago. The reason we were crazy enough to brave a trip to Chicago on Black Friday? Ron of Japan shrimp sauce. Mom ate a Ron of Japan while she was pregnant with each of us kids. I ate there when I was pregnant with Andrew, and so a trip was required to ensure the quality of this little one on-the-way.

After a really nice lunch at Connie's club, some of us braved the incredible crowds to venture onto North Michigan to see the decorations and, er, experience the chaos. A little bit was more than enough, but it's not often that I have the opportunity to shop in Chicago. So we spent a few hours poking around. Then at 5 we rejoined the rest of our group at the club and moved on to Ron of Japan. Andrew did a great job all day despite his lack of a nap, and we made it all the way home, even though we almost ran out of gas in the last half-mile.

Overall, it was a full, fun day. I wish my health had been better. Bryan was sick on Sunday-Wednesday, and I got sick Tuesday-today. Just a normal, winter sore throat, stuffy nose and cough thing. Hopefully I didn't infect everyone I cooked for on Thanksgiving!

Hope your holiday was a good one!

Althea

#### **Andrewisms (2007-11-24 18:04)**

Nov. 24: Andrew is such a beautiful, amazing little person. He's been sick with a cold for the last week. The bad cough is gone, and now he just has a runny nose. Who knows when that will clear up. Hopefully by April.

The little guy is currently watching Robin Hood again. He loves that show. It's funny to watch him try to walk out of the room when it's on TV. He keeps his eyes glued to the screen while his legs move him off to the side.

A few cute things that Andrew has been up to these days:

- My aunt Julie gave us a book that plays 200 bird songs. Andrew adores it. The other day, we actually sat and played each page, which took us an hour and 15 minutes. It is absolutely his favorite book/activity these days.
- Andrew is taken up an adorable habit of saying to his toys or to me or Bryan or to stuffed animals in stores, "You are my BEST friend. I love you SO MUCH."
- Sometimes when I say something like, "OK, sweet boy," Andrew will reply, "OK, sweet Mommy." He knows how to make a mom feel good!
- Andrew is crazy about identifying capital letters. He loves me to write his name in capital letters over and over and over. He's not, however into lower-case letters. In fact, if I try to mix some lower letters in to a writing game, he kind of freaks out and tries to desroy the paper.
- On Thanksgiving morning, Andrew ran around Terry's house (often on Maretta's back) calling out "Happy THANKSGIVING!"

### **Too cute (2007-11-29 07:02)**

Nov. 29: Andrew is so cute these days, it just makes me want to pop. Bryan feels the same way. In fact, last night as we were laying in bed, he said, "I think I might love Andrew too much." When I asked him why, he said that he was thinking back on all the adorable things he was doing this evening and just wanted to go in and pinch him.

I love that "must-pinch-the-cute-baby" feeling.

We got Andrew a baby doll the other day, and he's been having fun playing with her. She is called either Little Sister or Bucky Badger. He sings to her and puts her down to sleep in the little box she came in. And last night, he pretended to body slam her. But thanks to Bryan's intervention, he only pantomimed the attack. We're very gentle with babies.

In other news, my belly is getting enormous. And the little one in there got the hiccups for the first time the other day. Nice, rhythmic bumps in my belly. Last night, she was doing an Irish dance while I was trying to fall asleep. Silly baby!

I added a commenting feature back to the website, and I have plans to upgrade my photo gallery program. It's going to involve backing up and migrating databases, so I'm a little nervous, but I'm going to give it a whirl.

Happy last days of November!

Althea

### **Upgrading the gallery (2007-11-30 12:50)**

1 am update: I've installed Gallery2 and migrated all the photos. I even got it mostly working with Mambo. But there remain some pretty serious problems. However, as it is 1 am, I need to stop. Andrew has gotten out of bed in a falling/sleepwalking way tonight. Very odd.

Nov. 30: Andrew is currently not taking a nap. He's in his bed, banging on the wall occasionally. hmmm

While he is not-napping, I thought that I would try to work on the website upgrade I have planned. One unexpected issue is that downloading my huge-beyond-belief gallery is taking over an hour. So I tried messing with my website templates while I waited. The Christmas one I am using is somewhat horrible, but I think I like the seasonal-ness enough to use it.

If you end up having problems viewing photos in the next couple days, it's probably because of the work I'm doing. Hope you're having a good day!

Althea

## **3.12 December**

### **Winter Wonderland (2007-12-05 07:44)**

Dec. 5: It is just beautiful outside this morning. Snow is piled on on every corner. The sky is bright blue, the air is crisp, and the snow is pure white. Makes me want to walk around with my camera and take some photos as the sun was coming up.

The world feels festive and December-y.

After putting something like 20 hours into upgrading the gallery component of my website, it's still not working consistently. So I think I'm going to take a break and send Christmas cards and bake Christmas treats. I did attempt to make fudge last night. Let's just say the brown mass that I can barely cut through isn't quite fudge.

But it still tastes alright:)

Happy winter!

### **Currently eating...bakers chocolate (2007-12-07 13:44)**

Dec. 7: There are shavings of chocolate all over my face and protruding belly.

Andrew went down for his nap, and I found myself feeling a) pretty worn out and b) in definite need of some chocolate. So I checked my stashes.

- Chocolate chips - nope.
- Chocolate ice cream - out.
- Bag of peanut M &M's left over from Halloween - nada.

Feeling a bit panicky, I started digging in my baking drawer. Nuts, almond paste, sweetened condensed milk. Then, ah-ha! Baker's bittersweet chocolate. That should be edible. It's old enough that it had a slightly whitish waxy look, but biting into it, it gave me the coca fix that I was craving.

Some set of internal chemicals have been happily set to rights, and I can now enjoy the next hour (?) of Andrew's nap in a blissful, chocolat-ified state.

### **She's the size of four oranges (3.3 lbs) (2007-12-07 13:58)**

Dec. 7: I can't believe I'm at 31 weeks! This pregnancy continues to chug along merrily. I just keep getting bigger, but I like my round belly, and the baby is super active...especially when I lay down to sleep at night! I think I'm carrying this one quite a bit lower than I did with Andrew. Could be because of the gender difference. Could also be somewhat related to my general abdominal tone (I was going to the gym several days a week up until about this time with Andrew. The last time I regularly went to the gym was...when I was about seven months pregnant with Andrew:)

I've been feeling a little less starved in the last couple weeks. I do, however, eat very regular meals. Last weekend I was having some painless belly contracting and some lower back pain, which was slightly worrying. My midwives suggested taking it easy until I felt back to normal, so I just spent most of the weekend in my pjs, and Bryan did all the shoveling, Christmas decoration-box-carrying, and general household manual labor. I read the book Who's that Knocking on Christmas Eve to Andrew about 35 times. Good thing I really like that story:)

After a couple days of sitting at work, whatever physical shifts that were causing the symptoms had worked their way

out, and I'm now back to my happy, nearly symptom-free pregnancy. (Aside from the hunger and the big belly.) I'm at 31 weeks today. Crazy! We're in the final trimester:)

#### Week 29 Update:

Your baby's about 15.7 inches long now, and she weighs almost 3 pounds (like a head of cabbage). A pint and a half of amniotic fluid surrounds her, but that volume will decrease as she gets bigger and takes up more room in your uterus. Her eyesight continues to develop, though it's not very keen; even after she's born, she'll keep her eyes closed for a good part of the day. When she does open them, she'll respond to changes in light but will have 20/400 vision — which means she can only make out objects a few inches from her face. (Normal adult vision is 20/20.)

#### Week 31 Update:

This week, your baby measures over 16 inches long. He weighs about 3.3 pounds (try carrying four navel oranges) and is heading into a growth spurt. He can turn his head from side to side, and his arms, legs, and body are beginning to plump out as needed fat accumulates underneath his skin. He's probably moving a lot, too, so you may have trouble sleeping because your baby's kicks and somersaults keep you up. Take comfort: All this moving is a sign that your baby is active and healthy.

### **Broken hip (2007-12-12 09:18)**

Dec. 13: When I talked to my dad last night, he said that Grandma was scheduled to be in the hospital for about three days and then would be in rehab at a nursing home for about three weeks. If she's able to get her mobility back, that would put her back home around January 5...but I imagine that it's going to be a long road for my poor grandma. Her osteoporosis is really advanced, and her bones are so frail that they think that her hip may have broken while she was walking and caused her to fall rather than the fall causing the break. Old age is not for the faint of heart!

Speaking of old age, Grandma told me about the poem "When I am old, I shall wear purple" about 15 years ago. She got a really big kick out of it, and it makes me laugh because Grandma is so conscientious and quiet and reserved that the idea of her letting loose and "eating three pounds of sausage at a go" is just ridiculous!

3:30 pm update: Grandma's operation was successful, and she will be in recovery for about an hour.

Dec. 12: I just got a note from my dad this morning telling us that my grandma (his mom) fell in her kitchen last night while answering the back door.

She was taken by EMS to the Monroe Hospital. ER X-rays indicated that Grandma broke her hip. The break occurred at the "neck" of the femur and requires hip replacement surgery (replacing the ball of the hip), which is happening today.

My poor, sweet grandma!

### **Morning musings (2007-12-20 05:29)**

Dec. 20: I'm up early this morning. I think it's a combo of being excited about Joe coming home today and having that pre-trip adrenalin that always gets me excited and my mind working in overdrive. I think that having the living room light work Andrew up, because although it's only 5:50, he just joined me in the living room.

His train that is set up in our living room just traveled, "over the bridge and over the dam. berries for jam!" Now he's on to puzzles.

Bryan and I opened some of our Christmas presents to each other last night.

I got him all sorts of practical (read somewhat boring) warm things like socks and a hat and gloves. I am currently using the new computer gadget that he got for me...a much-needed external hard drive. Our laptop's memory is nearly maxed out, so I have been in near-dire need of more computer storage space! I'm currently backing up all 75 GB of pictures and video. It'll also be a relief to have all of it stored in a second space in case of disaster:)

Our December has been a fun and busy month! Last weekend, I traveled to Washington DC to spend the weekend with my good friends from high school, Heather, Anne, and Kacy.

We had a lovely time being together and catching up and eating lots of good food. Bryan was my hero, and (for the third time this fall) watched Andrew solo for the weekend so I could go have fun and reconnect with friends.

We drove down to Janesville last night to visit Mum and to take her out to see the Christmas lights. For some reason, it was a foggy night, but the snow was beautiful, and the lit-up houses twinkled. Mum seemed to be doing pretty well, which is always nice to see.

My dad is celebrating a big birthday this year, but with all that is going on with his mom's broken hip, it's been a really busy time for him. We're planning on getting together for dinner this evening at our house. Aunt Julie and Uncle Kevin might be joining us too!

I have felt like between travels and all the fun parties we've been gallivanting to this month that I'm barely able to get to all the holiday preparations that call to me. So last night after getting back from Janesville, Bryan and I buckled down. He wrapped presents while I finished up Christmas cards. At this point, I think I'm content with either being done with some holiday prep or just not doing it before we leave for Texas. Feels good to be able to set my lists aside! Oh, except Michael's present. I still need to get Michael his present.

hmmm

That's the update for now!

Althea

### **This baby is getting big! (2007-12-20 05:49)**

Dec. 20: My friend Julia just had a baby girl on Tuesday this week. Little Eleanore Faith. She had her (first) baby three and a half weeks early! Makes me a little nervous, because if I did the same thing, I'd have this little miss in the second week of January. I think she should keep cooking until early February:)

I continue to feel mostly symptom-free this pregnancy. My hips are starting to ache once in a while as they stretch, and this little peanut is getting bigger and less and less movable. Makes it harder to bend and twist, and her movements are getting increasingly, er, notable! We're looking forward to showing my big belly to Bryan's family this weekend.

Oh, and I have a cute story to share. I got home from a weekend trip to DC late on Sunday. On Monday morning, Andrew climbed in bed with me, and after cuddling for a moment, he noticed my belly. I think he was a bit startled by it, and he reached under the covers, put his hand on my belly, and said, "Baby sister too! I feel her!"

BabyCenter Week 33 update

This week your baby weighs a little over 4 pounds (heft a pineapple) and has passed the 17-inch mark. He's rapidly



losing that wrinkled, alien look and his skeleton is hardening. The bones in his skull aren't fused together, which allows them to move and slightly overlap, thus making it easier for him to fit through the birth canal. (The pressure on the head during birth is so intense that many babies are born with a conehead-like appearance.)

These bones don't entirely fuse until early adulthood, so they can grow as his brain and other tissue expands during infancy and childhood.

and looking back,

BabyCenter Week 32 Update:

By now, your baby weighs 3.75 pounds (pick up a large jicama) and is about 16.7 inches long, taking up a lot of space in your uterus. You're gaining about a pound a week and roughly half of that goes right to your baby. In fact, she'll gain a third to half of her birth weight during the next 7 weeks as she fattens up for survival outside the womb. She now has toenails, fingernails, and real hair (or at least respectable peach fuzz). Her skin is becoming soft and smooth as she plumps up in preparation for birth.

### **Ahh vacation! (2007-12-23 07:05)**

Dec. 23: We are happily settled in at Bryan's parent's house in Texas. We flew down on Friday, and Andrew did a really great job. It was his first flight in his own seat, and he was so excited about seeing Granny Lu and Grandad in TEXAS. It's neat to see him getting to a point where he remembers things and can hold onto a thought for a longer period of time. Here in College Station, the sun is shining, and the last couple days have seen temperatures in the 60s or even 70s. Lovely.

I'm getting to wear some of the nice summer maternity shirts that people lent me, and Andrew had had ample opportunities for backyard play. Yesterday, LuAnn and Melanie and I left Andrew with the guys and we took the afternoon for some girls time out. Did a little last-minute shopping and had a fun time being together.

It feels really good to be "on vacation" after the last month of fun (but very busy) activity. I'm relishing the feeling of switching gears from the go-go-go of holiday parties and Christmas preparation to a lower-key, just hanging out kind of lifestyle. We had a family poker night last night, which is always a lot of fun. Plus with "Christmas Edition Poker," all players ended the night with a gift card. Fun surprises at

Christmas time:)

It's hard to believe we still have two days until Christmas. The way the holiday fell this year means that we get to see Ben and Melanie for much longer than normal. They drove down from Dallas on Friday night, and they don't need to leave until Wednesday, so our time together is quite extended. It's a great treat:)

Andrew is enjoying putting puzzles together with his Granny Lu this morning. He's so excited to be here:) Hope all your Christmas preparations are fun!

Althea

### **Dotzour Christmas Letter (2007-12-23 07:21)**

Dec. 23: I got my Christmas cards out quite a bit later than normal this year (doing the Babler family cards earlier this month slowed me down! ) I hope you all have a wonderful Christmas celebration this year. My 2007 Christmas letter is below...

December 2007

Dear friends,

It's been quite a year!

In June, Andrew celebrated his second birthday with nearly his entire immediate family in attendance. He's beautiful and charming and stretches us each and every day. Identifying letters and animals keep him endlessly amused. His sweet little voice warms our hearts, and his determination keeps us on our toes.

In June we also learned that we're expecting a new addition to our family. My belly has expanded to huge proportions, and the "little sister" as we call her is expected to make her appearance in early February. I've been having fun finding the cutest little girl clothes!

Life since July has taken some really difficult turns. We had all so hoped that my mom would continue to beat the odds, but that just wasn't how life played out. I'm still trying to adjust to the idea that she is gone. I don't imagine anyone is ever ready to say goodbye to their mommy.

After losing Mom in August, we had a couple additional partings coming our way. Bryan's grandpa, Dandy, and my grandpa (my dad's dad) both passed away in October. We miss them both - especially during these holiday times of family togetherness - but we also celebrate their lives well-lived. What a rich heritage of families and work and values they leave behind!

We've experienced the richness of life's arch this year. Beginnings and endings. We're thankful for the wonderful and strong circle of friends and family who have gathered close around us this year. I feel so grateful for the strength and love of the people who support us.

Life keeps moving, and our work lives have experienced some changes this year as well. In September, Bryan found a new job. For the last few years, he has worked for Widen Enterprise in the field of "digital asset management" (helping companies store and access photos of their products). In his new job, he is a software engineer with a small microbiology company called OpGen that is working to develop technologies to help diagnose diseases by looking at the genetic makeup of bacteria. While he misses his past co-workers, I think the change has been a good one. Bryan has been energized by his work and has been learning and stepping up to some exciting challenges.

I've been at Gathering Waters Conservancy for four years now, and I just love my work. However, over the last months, I've been doing a lot of soul-searching, and I've decided that when the new baby comes along that I'm going to stop working and stay home with her and Andrew. I'm nervous about stepping away from a field that I care about so much, but I'm also excited about the opportunity to spend a lot of time with our little ones.

I hope all is well in your lives, and I want to offer my sincere thanks for all the caring we have received this year. I feel really lucky. On behalf of Bryan, Andrew, and myself, Merry Christmas, and best wishes for a new year that holds many wonderful surprises!

Naptime hello (2007-12-24 14:34)



Dec. 24: Andrew is napping for the first time in the past three days. He really needed it! This morning, he was in pretty rare form, and I think he threw about 8 tantrums over the course of a few hours.

After sobbing in Mark's library for a while because I had handed him the wrong book (a wrong that just could not be righted in his mind), he suddenly stopped crying, came out, and said, "I was very sad. I'm sorry. I feel better now." This morning, he woke early and came around to cuddle with me in bed for about 20 minutes. Then he climbed over me, and woke Bryan by saying, "Daddy, it's Christmas Day!!" When corrected, he wasn't that phased, and happily shouted, "It's Christmas Eve!"

We've barely talked at all about Santa or what happens on Christmas. Last night, though, I read him *The Night Before Christmas*. He was absolutely enthralled. It didn't take any more than one reading of that story for him to grasp the idea that Santa comes down the chimney and brings presents. My tiny tot's eyes were definitely all aglow:)

Today we're doing lots of food preparation, puzzle assembly, and napping. For our Christmas eve dinner tonight, we're looking forward to pork tenderloin, rolls, other-things-I'm-sure, and pie. Andrew's looking forward to leaving cookies out for Santa.

I have finally uploaded some pictures to the gallery too...

**Merry Christmas! (2007-12-25 13:44)**



Dec. 25: Christmas Day greetings to all my friends and family who may be checking up on the website! We've enjoyed a really nice morning together so far. Ben and Mark have spent the early afternoon playing with their toy helicopters and cars. Melanie is working on some wooden puzzles. Bryan's trying out some new music on new headphones, and I just finished setting up a web camera I got for Bryan's parent's so we can try doing video calls over the internet. LuAnn put Andrew down for his nap, and he is now peacefully sleeping. My family is home in Wisconsin at Grandma and Grandpa's house. Sounded like they had a full house, with all my dad's siblings and my cousin Abe and his family in attendance. Grandma is at the nursing home/rehab center, so I'm sure it's a different feeling Christmas in Monroe without any grandparents in at home.

We had a breakfast of pulla this morning...a cardamom bread rolled with almond and raspberry filling and shaped like a wreath. Then for lunch, we enjoyed chili made by Melanie. Since I burned my tongue by eating it too soon, I needed Blue Bell ice cream afterwards:)

Ben and Melanie are still in town until tomorrow night, and we're still here until Friday, so there's a feeling of lazy relaxation. It's nice to still be in your jammies at 3 pm on Christmas Day:)

Lots of photos from our morning are in the gallery.

**Thinking of names (2007-12-27 12:26)**

Dec. 27: Bryan and I got to go out on a date last night while Bryan's parents stayed home with Andrew. A good time was had by all!

Bryan and I ate out at a good restaurant and had fun splitting several dishes. We somewhat accidentally also ended up ordering \$18 worth of bottled water. Oops!

Afterwards, we went to a book store, and I stumbled upon a really neat book called *The Baby Name Wizard*.

We've barely talked about names at all, and we ended up using our night out as a kick-start to the baby name discussion. After reading through the book, we each picked out 20-30 names we liked. Then we've spent some time this morning combining lists and grouping our favorites.

We've now weaned it down to a list of seven possible names, and I think we're going to let it simmer for a while. Bryan asked Andrew to say each of the names, and they sounded so sweet in his little voice. My guess is that we won't settle on a name until we meet the little one face to face.

As of tomorrow (Friday), I'll be at 34 weeks of pregnancy. Wow!

Here's the update from BabyCenter.com with info on my little cantaloupe:

✕ Your baby now weighs about 4 3/4 pounds (like your average cantaloupe) and is almost 18 inches long. Her fat layers — which will help regulate her body temperature once she's born — are filling her out, making her rounder. Her skin is also smoother than ever. Her central nervous system is maturing and her lungs are continuing to mature as well. If you've been nervous about preterm labor, you'll be happy to know that babies born between 34 and 37 weeks who have no other health problems generally do fine. They may need a short stay in the neonatal nursery and may have a few short-term health issues, but in the long run, they usually do as well as full-term babies.

### **It's a beautiful day...from my view on the couch (2007-12-27 12:47)**

Dec. 27: Ahhh, December in Texas. It's a nice day out today. Temperature in the mid-sixties, a little breeze, the air smells green and sweet. I can smell the breeze because I have the windows open.

Unlike my husband and son, who have been outdoors a lot this week, I have surprised myself by only venturing out a couple times. "How ridiculous!" I think. Why would I, who love a beautiful day, plant myself on a sofa for days at a time. Who knows, but I have certainly enjoying "slugging it." I've knitting a bunch, ripped out everything I knitted because I forgot to reduce a few stitches for the armholes of Andrew's sweater, and tried with only mild success to get my newly upgraded website gallery working fully.

It's been a very relaxing and quite restorative vacation, despite my lack of motivation to enjoy the out-of-doors. We head back home tomorrow morning, and I'm then looking forward to four days of vacation at home before returning to work on Jan. 2. Maretta has a wedding shower on Saturday, and I'm looking forward to getting together with my family for a "Christmas" get-together on Dec. 30. The fun just keeps on coming!

### **Should I be worried? (2007-12-31 08:30)**

Dec. 31: Hmmm. As I type, Andrew is watching *The Dance of the Hours* on Fantasia.

At the part where the hippo emerges from the fountain, Andrew turned to me with a big smile and said, "It's a mommy, mommy hippo!" "Just like YOU!"

Maybe he just likes the hippo a lot. Or maybe my girth is very reminiscent of a ballet-dancing hippo...

**Home again, home again (2007-12-31 09:03)**



Dec. 31: I feel like this vacation just keeps going on and on and on. It's lovely! We flew back home to Wisconsin on Friday afternoon in the midst of a big snow storm. Fortunately (surprisingly, really) our flight wasn't delayed in the slightest. Uncle Joe picked us up at the airport, which was good, because Andrew really wasn't too keen on the idea of leaving Texas. His refrain most of the flight home was "Let's go back!" Knowing that Uncle Joe was going to be at the other end provided enough of an incentive to keep him OK with the idea of leaving. I don't think he could have had a better time during our trip. Being at Granny and Grandad's house is everything a little boy could want. Our awesome neighbor, Jenni, snowplowed our driveway for us as the snow fell thick and heavy, and we enjoyed getting back to our home. The kitties, who had been cold and lonely for a week, were a little psycho, but at this point, they have had their kitty love-tanks filled, and they are feeling back-to-normal.

On Saturday, Bryan took Andrew duty most of the day while I jumped into Maretta's wedding planning. We enjoyed a cake testing at La Brioche, went to a couple alterations places to find someone who could help us bustle her gown, and spent the afternoon at a bridal shower hosted by Maretta's maid-of-honor, Laurie. It was a fun-filled day! Maretta, Kyle, and Kyle's mom, Marilyn also came over yesterday, and we spent a couple hours going over lots of wedding details together. The conversation continues at 1:30 today. We have lots to pack into the short time that we're both home!

Last night we had my whole family over for a Christmas-time get-together. Becky volunteered her mom to make us a lasagna, and it got rave reviews from all who tasted it. It's crazy that just immediate family makes for a party of 12 people! Andrew got to open a few presents, and he was in 7th heaven, playing with all of his aunts and uncles. This morning he woke up and said to me with a wistful voice, "Uncle Kyle played with me."

Andrew was a stellar flyer, and he's been in a really good mood since we got home. Bryan and I have both been unsuccessful in putting him down for naps, but when Uncle Joe or Aunt Maretta go in to do a "closing," he goes to sleep just fine. What gives?? I think we just need someone else to live with us to put Andrew down for naps.

Hope you enjoy a happy New Year's Eve!

Photos from the last week are in the gallery.






## 4. 2008

### 4.1 January

**You should see her move! (2008-01-06 21:08)**

 Jan. 6: Woof...I'm feeling pretty big. At 35 weeks, this little one is supposed to be a bit over 5 lbs...the weight of a honeydew melon. When she gets active, I really notice! I think she's still head-up, with her head nestled just under my right ribs. I have a midwife appointment tomorrow, so perhaps she'll be able to tell if the little one has flipped. Because of the holidays, this will be my first appointment in a month. Hard to believe that there are only three weeks until I am "term" and five weeks until our predicted due date.

Bryan's mom is coming into town on February 2 with the hopes of being here to help with Andrew when the little one makes her entrance.

Tomorrow's appointment will also be the first to which I am taking Andrew. I'm working three days/week for the next two weeks, and my last official day at work is January 17. So on Monday tomorrow, I'll be home with the little guy for a day together. I wonder if he'll be interested in listening to the baby's heart beat with the doppler.

BabyCenter.com Week 35 update

Your baby doesn't have much room to maneuver now that he's over 18 inches long and tips the scales at 5 1/4 pounds (pick up a honeydew).

Because it's so snug in your womb, he isn't likely to be doing somersaults anymore, but the number of times he kicks should remain about the same. His kidneys are fully developed now, and his liver can process some waste products. Most of his basic physical development is now complete — he'll spend the next few weeks putting on weight.

## Melting snowy weekend at Jack's (2008-01-06 21:40)



Jan. 6: We're back home from a really nice weekend at Jack's house. As we prepared for it, I was very aware that it was our first trip to Jack's since Mom died. In fact, as I was getting ready to go, I kept having sort of flashbacks to our trip last summer.

It was a few days after our trip to Mayo where we were told that Mom's cancer had most likely returned and was not treatable. Mom wasn't feeling good, but she supervised the cooking, and in retrospect, it was one of the last fun things we did together as a family. I still can't believe that only two weeks later we were starting to work with Hospice and four weeks later she was gone. I really still don't feel like I can get my mind around all that. But that background was the undercurrent of my thoughts as we planned for our winter trip to Jack's this year.

One thing that I haven't been sure about how to approach is how to recognize or acknowledge Mom and the fact that she's not here as we get together for family activities. Our mode of operation thus far these last months has mostly been to try to get through milestones without melodrama and by trying to make evens as fun as possible. I find so much comfort in being with my siblings. When we're all together, things just kind of seem OK at the same time that our togetherness makes it that much more obvious who is not there.

But there's something about all of us and the parts of Mom that we all bring to situations just by being ourselves that makes the tightness in my heart soften and my worries about how we'll move forward seem less relevant.

And our winter weekend at Jack's was a lot of fun. Andrew had a blast, and Bryan and I so appreciate having a house full of people who love and help to care for him. On Saturday, we took a long walk on some roads near Jack's house. Andrew had fun throwing snowballs, getting thrown into snow banks, running fast down the hills, and getting carried about half the time. Even so, he walked for perhaps a couple miles, and he had a good time about 98 % of the time. Jack had a big bonfire, and several of us enjoyed sitting near it and watching the fire burn. There was a lot of Trivial Pursuit and a poker tournament, which Becky-who-has-never-played-poker won:) I made a chocolate cake last night. I love baking cakes! Bryan enjoyed some sauna time this morning interspersed with a jump in the snow.

Overall, it was a relaxing, fun, and feel-good kind of weekend. Photos are in the gallery.

**Baking bread (2008-01-06 22:00)**



Jan. 6: As I look at 2008 and try to envision life as the mother of two children and in my new upcoming role as stay-at-home mom, I find that the future appears exciting and daunting and more than a little nebulous. Since I tend to be an overly-organized person, I think that one of the things I am the most worried about with staying home is that home life doesn't really require progress toward goals or plans or order. But I think I need those things. So at some point, I plan to sit down and begin to create a series of goals for myself over the next year. One of the things that I know I want on my list is learning to easily and consistently make a good loaf of homemade bread.

Becky made some yummy bread for us at Jack's and that inspired me. So tonight, I made a loaf of bread, and I am still up at 11pm waiting to wrap it up for breakfast tomorrow. I snitched a bit, and warm with a pat of butter, it was amazing. I think it is the first loaf of bread I've made that has risen well ever. Ahh, success! I will sleep well tonight with the taste of bread on my tongue and the promise of bread with butter and strawberry jam for breakfast

tomorrow!

Photos from the last week are in the gallery.

### **About a month to go (?) (2008-01-07 19:51)**

Jan. 7: Andrew and I had our first joint prenatal visit to my midwife today. Andrew thought the whole thing was really cool, and my midwife was nice about including him. They measured my belly together (33 cm from bottom to top). Andrew was excited to keep the tape measurer. They also put some jelly on my belly and used a doppler to listen to the heart beat. She was at 148 beats/minute today. Andrew was a little concerned about the noise of the doppler...it's a loud swishing sound with lots of static instead of a quiet "ba-dum" heart beat. When my midwife stepped out, Andrew said, "That lady put peanut butter...I mean jelly on your belly. And I was nervous."

My midwife was having a hard time confirming that the baby was head down, so she brought in an ultrasound machine. More jelly on the belly, and Andrew and I got to see "pictures" of little sister. Andrew quickly lost interest because the images look nothing like a person. She confirmed that the baby is indeed head-down, which is a really nice thing. It also means that the lump that moves around up by my ribs is her baby bottom. She spent a couple moments confirming that there was a good amount of amniotic fluid, and she took a peek at the heart and the umbilical cord. Amazing to see her heart valves pumping and the arteries in the umbilical cord!

As we left, Andrew received a sticker. Later in the day, he woke up from his nap and said, "We measured you with the measurer. Then we put jelly on you and listened to the baby's heart beat. Then we saw a picture. And I got a sticker of a warthog!" He clearly thought it was a pretty neat experience. My next appointment is in two weeks. I'll be 37 weeks!

### **At this time during my last pregnancy... (2008-01-09 07:15)**

Jan. 9: While I was in the shower this morning, I was marveling at the fact that I have less than five weeks until my "due date." The new one's approaching birth feels more real. In fact, I took tags off newborn clothes and washed them last night. SO CUTE!!!

My mind drifted to think about what I was doing when I was at this point in my pregnancy with Andrew. On the equivalent of New Year's, Bryan and I had walked the Syttende Mai walk together. Then I had a fun surprise baby shower. It was late May when I was 35 weeks pregnant with Andrew. Ben and Melanie had just visited, and I had just set up this website.

And the equivalent of this week was when my mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I remember getting a phone call from her on a Thursday afternoon saying cheerfully that she was in the hospital, but it was just to have some tests run. No need to panic. I could come by to visit after work.

My first real posts to my website were about Mom's health.

I remember how sad she sounded when we started getting bad news, and she said that she didn't want me to have to put that kind of news on my website because it was supposed to be a place to post things about the new baby. I told her that I thought of my website as a place to post things about life, and this was life, so from my perspective, there shouldn't be censorship to limit it to the planned and the happy.

It feels like there was a lot of time between the point when Mom was diagnosed and when Andrew was born one month later. There were so many doctor's appointments. SO much overwhelming research and learning about cancer and treatments. We had the first of what became two-and-a-quarter years of packing my entire family into

doctor's offices to talk about treatment options. Urgh.

I guess that as I've had that flashback, I'll just be glad that we had as much time with Mom as we did after that initial hard diagnosis. And I'll be glad that we don't have any reason to expect that the last month of this pregnancy will be filled with such difficult times.

It's a pretty day today. The sun seems to have come out from the clouds, and there's good music on the radio:)

### **Glorious lack of weekend plans (2008-01-12 09:08)**

Jan. 12: Could it get better than this? Andrew and Bryan are outside playing in the falling snow. They are having a great time going, "woohooohwowoooo" and then falling down. Andrew has his Curious George ball ready to kick down the street. It's a quiet, gray morning, and the snow is falling softly.

These last weeks, Andrew wakes up in the morning and climbs in bed with me for a cuddle. His sleeper is usually unzipped, and one of his legs is hanging out. He likes me to smell his feet and say, "STINKY! Ahhh choo!" Then I zip him up, and we cuddle for five minutes or so before he gets up and goes back to his room to play for a bit. Sometimes we both lie quietly, but this morning, we were looking at each other nose-to-nose, and he whispered, "I have dark brown eyes, Mama." Before he climbed out of bed, he patted my tummy and said, "Hi little sister. She is coming soon. Then it will be Daddy and Andrew and little sister and Mommy." He seems to be catching on to the idea.

I think I've entered some new nesting phase. I decided in the last couple days that we needed to have more things ready for the baby, so since she won't have her own nursery, I have plans this weekend to clear out one of our bookshelves and organize her dresser and pull up more of the baby items from the basement. I also bought baby announcements when Joe and I went shopping yesterday, and I have a strong urge to address them. I also have a strong urge to finish Andrew's sweater. But I just discovered last night that I haven't ever done normal increases before, so first I need to learn how to do those so I can finish the sleeves.

We have nearly zilch scheduled for the weekend. Wonderful. I'm hoping to help Bryan prep the bathroom so he can paint it and then I can put up my little wall stickers and put out the new towels I got. That will be a good project to have checked off.

Yesterday Joe and I made a shopping run to Target, and while Joe amused Andrew (fixing the cart with pretend super glue and racing around), I was able to get all sorts of random items that I've been wanting for a long time. All day, I've been happy that Andrew's craft drawer is better organized because of those new plastic tubs! And we got a new coffee maker. It's replacing Bryan's from college, and it's red, pretty, and doesn't seem to spill coffee when you pour a cup. Brilliant!

### **One of those moms (2008-01-14 07:10)**

Jan. 14: Andrew decided not to nap yesterday. He was in his room for a couple hours, but he was singing and shouting and very much not sleeping.

After he got up, I decided to make a run back to Target with him to pick up a few more big plastic tubs (red and green on sale post-Christmas) so I can store all the books that got bumped when I made space for "little sister's" pretty things.

The drive to Target was fine, but as I turned off the car, the CD we were listening to switched tracks, and the story Goldilocks and the Three Bears was up next. Andrew decided he wanted to listen to the whole story NOW. As I pulled him out of the car, he threw an incredible tantrum.

So I got stubborn and put him under one arm and carried him into the store kicking and screaming. As we walked through the store, me 8 1/2 months pregnant, Andrew screaming and thrashing under one arm as I pushed the cart with the other arm, I couldn't help but imagine all the other shoppers who must be looking at me with varying degrees of pity and relief that they weren't me!

### **Baby sister Week 36 update (2008-01-14 07:30)**

Jan. 14: I've been fluctuating these days between feeling really-ultra pregnant-this-can't-go-on with totally-normal-no-symptoms-even-sleeping-though-the-night. Now that I had a weekend of accomplishing things at home, I feel calmer knowing that "little sister" has a space prepared for her. Andrew has been so excited about tending to his dolly...putting her down for naps in the cradle, patting her when she cries, bringing her to me to give kisses.

I'm home with Andrew today, and then I have three days of work this week. My last day is Thursday! Hard to believe. It's going to be some big life changes.

#### **Babycenter.com Week 36 update**

Your baby is still packing on the pounds — at the rate of about an ounce a day. She now weighs almost 6 pounds (like a crenshaw melon) and is more than 18 1/2 inches long. She's shedding most of the downy covering of hair that covered her body as well as the vernix caseosa, the waxy substance that covered and protected her skin during her nine-month amniotic bath. Your baby swallows both of these substances, along with other secretions, resulting in a blackish mixture, called meconium, will form the contents of her first bowel movement.


At the end of this week, your baby will be considered full-term. (Full-term is 37 to 42 weeks; babies born before 37 weeks are pre-term and those born after 42 are post-term.) Most likely she's in a head-down position.

### **Last day of work (2008-01-17 08:30)**

Jan. 17: It's a wintry Thursday morning, and I'm sitting in my office for the last time. Today is my last day at Gathering Waters, and we're all getting ready to head to Milwaukee for a board meeting and Stewardship Fund celebration event. I've wrapped everything up, so weird! Andrew's having his last day at Karen's today too. It's almost time for some big changes!



## Week 37 - Full term! (2008-01-20 10:20)

 Jan. 20: I'm lounging on our comfy chair as I type, and my entire belly is rocking and rolling. It's sort of amazing to watch!

Bryan and Andrew are playing with play-doh and listening to fun songs.

Things are approaching readiness for the little one's arrival. I got a sweet blanket from Aunt Kate in the mail last week, and I've been sleeping with it since a) it's so very soft and sweet and b) to get it smelling like Mama so the little one doesn't have to cuddle up to a more sterile world.

I've been reading my books on labor, we are registered to do a tour of the Meriter Hospital birthing area this afternoon, and tomorrow evening, we are meeting with our doula (birthing assistant), Laura Anderson. Laura was a great help and support for both Bryan and me when Andrew was born, so we're looking forward to working with her again.

I have a set of baby clothes picked out to pack for the hospital. I think this weekend I'll at least make a list of the things I want to bring for myself.

We're still working on names, and I think we have our list narrowed down to four. I like them all, so we're just going to wait until we meet her to decide. It's super cold outside. I hope the weather warms a bit before we bring the little one home. On the other hand, Andrew was born when it was 95 degrees, so if it happened to be -5 degrees when little sister is born, that would be a bit of a cool coincidence!

BabyCenter.com Week 37 Update:

How your baby's growing:

Congratulations — your baby is full term! This means that if your baby arrives now, his lungs should be fully mature and ready to adjust to life outside the womb, even though your due date is still three weeks away.

Your baby weighs 6 1/3 pounds and measures a bit over 19 inches, head to heel (like a stalk of Swiss chard). Many babies have a full head of hair at birth, with locks from 1/2 inch to 1 1/2 inches long. But don't be surprised if your baby's hair isn't the same color as yours.

Dark-haired couples are sometimes thrown for a loop when their children come out as blonds or redheads, and fair-haired couples have been surprised by Elvis look-alikes. And then, of course, some babies sport only peach fuzz.

### So much cuteness (2008-01-20 10:31)



Jan. 20: I feel like I have a whole book full of stories I want to share about Andrew. He's been doing such cute things! This morning, for example, he slept late (7:20) and crawled into bed. He was so sunny and loving. The sun was out, so as I attempted to open my eyes, he had his nose touching mine, and he smiled as he blinked along with me. Then he crawled over my (enormous) bulk to cuddle with Daddy. He turned on my CD (James Galway) and told me when he was hearing the flute or the harp.

Bryan and I finished painting and decorating the bathroom last night, and I had put wall stickers up. Andrew was pretty impressed to patter into the bathroom and see frogs and butterflies and caterpillars and other garden critters all over.

The little guy has needed a hair cut for quite some time, and after breakfast this morning, my little lion cub sat in front on his favorite show (Fantasia's "Horses" aka the Pastoral Symphony). Mommy Lion trimmed his curls while the little lion cub watched his show while sitting on the coffee table. I'd done past hair cuts in the bathtub or longer ago in his high chair. The video-watching scenario worked well. I just hope I didn't cut too much. After I get it wet and can see how it curls up, I'll know for sure.

Pictures from the last several weeks are in the gallery.

### Support at the end (2008-01-21 13:04)

Jan. 21: I got a really sad phone call last week from one of my co-workers. Her dear friend has been dealing with breast cancer for a couple years, and Karen just received news that Cindy only has weeks left to live. Although I only

know Cindy slightly, my heart just aches for her family. To know that another group of loving, supportive people are in the process of switching gears from treatment to maintenance to saying goodbye. The worst part is that Cindy has two young kids. That makes me so sad and scared. It makes me cry to see again the strange twists that life can take. No matter how much we all try to do the right things in our lives, sometimes things just don't work out how we would like them to. I keep trying to live life the best ways that I know how, but I think that the last year has encouraged me to hang on to the current moment more than ever before.

Oh, and I so want to be around to see my babies grow up. Everyone should have that. The alternative is just far too sad...for everyone.

### Thoughts on switching jobs (2008-01-21 13:21)



Jan. 21: Andrew and I are enjoying our first day of my new job as stay-at-home mom. Well, were I still at work, I would have had today off, so may tomorrow will be more like the first official day that I won't be reporting in to the Gathering Waters office like normal. I had a really nice last few weeks at work. Mike Carlson took over all my policy work, and I think he's going to do a great job. Liz is going to be taking on some of the more administrative parts of my job. I sense is that they'll all miss me and that it won't be the same without me (so that makes me feel needed), but that they'll get along alright without me (and that makes me feel like it's OK to go).

By working part time the first three weeks in January, I was able to get all the loose ends of my work wrapped up. My co-workers threw me a really fun going away party last Wednesday. Activities included toenail painting, eating yummy food, watching a cool slide show about reasons they will and won't miss me at work, reading a flow chart that describes how to get two children out of the house and into a car in summer or winter, and generally being silly.

I just simply love my co-workers. So it's a good thing that I'll still see them lots in my new life. We've got lunches planned:)

Last Thursday (my last day), we had a board meeting and a fancy Stewardship Fund celebration reception in Milwaukee. I liked having the opportunity to say goodbye to our board members. And it was fun to have my last work event be a party! Some pictures of my going away party and the Stewardship event are in the gallery.

#### **More Andrew cuteness (2008-01-21 13:36)**



Jan. 21: When I posted yesterday, I neglected to include several of Andrew's recent cute mannerisms that I know will change shortly, so I wanted to record here for posterity.

He likes singing songs or saying things by changing the first letter. For example, he gets a great kick out of singing, "Dinkle, dinkle dittle dar." Also, in a new interest in anatomy, he laughs hysterically as he says, "Not a teenis!"

The other day, Andrew came in the room and said quietly, "Daddy, I'd like to talk to you." (while motioning for Bryan to come over to him...exactly like Bryan does with Andrew). I could just overhear Andrew telling Bryan, "I feel nervous."

What a sweet, sincere little person Andrew is!

I wanted to run the vacuum cleaner this morning, and Andrew asked me in a slightly panic-y tone of voice to please not vacuum because it scares him. I showed him how much the vacuum helped me, and I understood that he didn't like the loud noise. I encouraged him to blow on his little horn so he would be making a lot of noise too. So Andrew went into his room, went behind the rocking chair, and peeked wide-eyed around at me vacuuming the hall rug while he tooted determinedly on his little horn.

Andrew has been having a hard time falling asleep for naps. Today between his pre-nap books, we had a little talk about things that can help in falling asleep. I told him about how cold and snowy it was outside and yet how warm and cozy his bed is. And I told him how nice it can be to take a deep breath and snuggle down into your blankets.

When he crawled into his bed after the book, I noticed that he was breathing really funny and had to smile when I realized that he was just taking his versions of the deep breaths that I'd suggested.

#### **Is there anything more wonderful than baby clothes? (2008-01-22 14:50)**



Jan. 22: I am surrounded by a couch laden with little baby clothes. My neighbor, Kathy, has a four-month-old daughter and a three-year-old daughter, and she just brought me a huge basket full of clothes for tiny babies. I think

that "little sister's" wardrobe size just doubled. We had received so many hand-me-downs from Vicki when Andrew was little, I was a little worried that baby sister wouldn't have quite enough clothes. That fear has now been banished.

I've been reveling in the little clothes. Folding them, stacking them, fondling them. Such sweet tiny outfits! What little socks and tiny hats. Such adorable little sleepers and dresses and gowns. I think I could hold them all afternoon.

Basking in the loveliness of baby clothes makes me miss my mom. If she were here, I would have called her right when I put Andrew down for his nap. Whether she was working or at home, I would have said, "As soon as you can, drop everything and come over to my house. We have some baby clothes to admire!" I may have even tried to hold off looking at them until she came over (probably not).

Then we would look at each one, hold it up, admire the gussets and the embroidery and the well-thought-out features. We would have come up with possible outfits, and Mom would have offered sage advice about various baby things. If she were here, I could have even gotten annoyed at her for a moment if I wanted to. That would be nice.

There are a couple pieces of clothing in the pile that are from some clothing lines that were around when Andrew was a baby. I remember looking at them with Mom and wondering if we should buy something from those lines in case someone had a baby girl someday. Maybe Maretta...or one of my friends... It sort of makes me happy and sad to look at those little outfits and remember some of those happy times. If there was one thing that made Mom ecstatic, it was shopping for clothes for kids. She often said that the only reason she had kids was so she could dress them. She was mostly kidding:)

With all these new clothes, I feel a little like it is Christmas Eve.

I have so much anticipation about this little person. It's a sweet moment to be in. I'm not dealing with post-labor exhaustion. The baby hasn't outgrown anything yet. It's all just something sweet and wonderful to be thinking about. So I'll pile the clothes around me and dream baby dreams until Andrew wakes up from his nap. It's just me, Spooky, and the clothes:)



## Birth plans (2008-01-22 15:10)



Jan. 22: We took a tour of Meriter's birthing center on Sunday afternoon. It was actually a sibling tour, so Andrew got to hold some warm blankets, learn how to make the bed move up and down, and see where the snacks were kept down the hall. I think that at this point, we're close enough to the baby's arrival that he'll remember the hospital when he comes back next time. It's kind of awe-inspiring to imagine him coming to the hospital to meet his new sibling. I feel a little nervous...like it's a blind date. Most of me is entirely sure that he'll adore his sister, but isn't it a bit weird to imagine saying, "Hey Andrew, come over here and meet our new family member. She's here for keeps!"

The best thing I learned is that Meriter has wireless internet access, so that means that I'll get to post photos and updates after the baby is born. With Andrew, I couldn't send out an email until we got home, so there was a 3-day delay. I don't promise to send out anything hours after the birth, but it's nice to know that I can send an update whenever I want.

Michael is my Andrew-care-taker-in-waiting for the next ten days. After that, Bryan's mom is coming up from Texas and staying with us to help out for two weeks. So I feel pretty good about my Andrew-coverage for the birth and hospital stay. You can usually stay for two days after a normal delivery, so that's probably what we'll do.

Here's a link to some information for visitors to Meriter. The Birthing Center is on the fourth, fifth, and sixth floors,



and you take the North elevator to get there.

My "due date" is February 8, so I've probably still got some time, but the big event is coming. And I think that's a good thing:)

### He's a bird-watcher! (2008-01-23 13:57)



Jan. 23: I had a nice list of things to do during Andrew's nap this afternoon. But I was so sleepy when I put him down that I decided I should just rest on the sofa. And since I can't really nap, my version of resting is reading blogs and posting new things to my website. One thing I wanted to share was how cute Andrew is when he decides he wants to go bird watching. He made a pair of binoculars out of toilet paper rolls and string, and now one of his favorite games is to stalk around the house saying, "There! In that tree! What is it?" Then Bryan or I offer a suggested bird name, and he uses his binos to spot it. Our yard is rather bereft of songbirds (due perhaps to our excellent owl and hawk population), but when we stopped by Dad's house this morning, we saw a chickadee in a bush a few feet away. Andrew stopped and looked at it amazedly. It sang its "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" song a couple times, and Andrew said in a hushed tone, "Mommy, it's a chickadee!" How did I get lucky enough to have a little guy who loves animals as much as I do? We watched my bird song video...an admittedly somewhat boring loop of backyard birds and their songs. Andrew was just fascinated. Pictures of the last few days are in the gallery.

## Gingerbread displays and remembering Mom (2008-01-23 14:13)



Jan. 23: Andrew and I went over to Dad's house this morning so I could photograph some of Dad's Christmas displays. This year, he created an enormous gingerbread castle as a surprise Christmas present for Mareta. Pictures from Dad's displays are in the gallery.

As we started to walk up to the house, Andrew asked me, "Who will be there?" I told him that Grandpa would be there. He said, "And Grandma too?" At that point, a weird flip-flopping thing happened in my heart. Andrew easily points out his Grandma in pictures, and he knows that I miss her, but other than that, he hasn't ever brought her up. It made me feel both good and sad that he remembered that this is where she is supposed to be too. So I told him that, no, Grandma isn't here. "She's sick," Andrew said. Yes, I told him, Grandma was sick. And now we miss her. And then I reminded him about the books Grandma liked to read him like *Quick as a Cricket* and *There's a Train Going By My Window*. Then we went inside and he played with his toys like normal. Sometimes the reality of our reality just throws me for a loop!

## Baking bread update (2008-01-24 13:11)

Jan. 24: I've been having fun spending time in the kitchen this week. I love to cook or bake, but normally, I just have no time for it! So this week, I've had fun doing all sorts of things that require one to be able to check in on the kitchen over the course of the day.

I'm on my third loaf of bread for the week, I made yogurt, and yesterday I made a lemon-strawberry pie in honor of national pie day.

I imagine that once "little sister" comes I won't be cooking quite as much, but right now it sure is fun.

The bread I've been working on this week is just a white sandwich loaf. I hope to move on to French and whole-wheat and sour dough and rolls once I get the sandwich loaf down pat. For those who are interested, here's the recipe that I've been working with. The loaf I made yesterday was wonderful. Reminded me of Mom's bread:

From James Beard:

Ingredients:

1 package active dry yeast

1 Tablespoon sugar

1 1/2 cups 110-115 degree water (I found that I'm having much more success when I measure the water temperature instead of guessing!)

1 heaping teaspoon salt

around 4 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour

Warm the bowl you'll use for rising by filling it with hot water. In my house, I don't have a good, warm place for the dough to rise, so I've also been turning the oven on warm for about two minutes, then opening the door a crack while the dough is mixed.

Combine all the ingredients in Kitchen Aid mixer with the dough hook and mix for about five minutes. I start by adding about 3 1/2 cups of flour and add more until I get the consistency I'm looking for. It shouldn't be sticking to the sides too much and should form a nice smooth, elastic ball.

Oil the bowl, put your ball of dough in, and turn it around several times so the surface is slightly oiled. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, cover with a towel, and put in a warm, draft-free place (in my case, the oven) to rise. Andrew likes to blow it a kiss at this point and to tell it to have a good nap.

I a couple or a few hours later, the dough should be doubled in size. Punch it down, give it a couple kneads, re-form it into a ball, and let it re-rise for another couple hours, until doubled in bulk. James Beard says that this second rising makes the dough finer in texture and better in flavor.

After the second rising, punch the dough down, and take it out of the bowl. Lightly flour the counter, and shape the dough into a square about 1 inch thick. Cover with a towel, and let it rest for five minutes. Meanwhile grease your bread pan well with butter. Fold the dough into thirds, and fold and pinch the seam together. Fold the ends and roll and pinch them in as well so you end up with a well-shaped loaf. Pop this in to the bread pan, seam-side down. Press down so the loaf fits well.

Cover the loaf with plastic wrap, put in a warm place to rise - for me it's been around an hour and a half. When the bread has risen just over the edge of the pan, pre-heat the oven to 400 degrees. Bake the bread for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat to 350 degrees and bake for about 30 minutes. You can turn out the bread and knock on the bottom to see if it's done. It should have a hollow sound. Cool the bread on a wire rack and devour with butter and honey or jam.

### **She's getting to be such a little person (2008-01-25 13:49)**

Jan. 25: This little baby is at 38 weeks! I had an appointment with my midwife today, and the good news is that there's not much to report:) Baby flipped earlier this week, so she's lying along my left side now. The flipping process wasn't fun on my part. It took her about half a day to get re-situated in her new position. She's still head-down, though, so that's what matters!

I've gained 25-30 pounds since June, and I'm definitely feeling pretty heavy these days. My blood pressure is still low (110/64), so that makes my care providers happy. My tummy only grew by a half-centimeter this week. It now measures 35 1/2 cm from bottom to top. I'm carrying this baby much lower than I did with Andrew. Oh, and I got the good news at my appointment today that my Strep B test was negative, so I don't have to have antibiotics administered during labor. A good thing!

We met with Laura, our doula, on Tuesday, so she's ready to come over to help support me and Bryan when I labor at home and then when we move on to the hospital. I'm excited to birth and meet this little one!

How your baby's growing:

Your baby has really plumped up. She weighs about 6.8 pounds and she's over 19 1/2 inches long (like a leek). She has a firm grasp, which you'll soon be able to test when you hold her hand for the first time! Her organs have matured and are ready for life outside the womb.

Wondering

what color your baby's eyes will be? You may not be able to tell right away. If she's born with brown eyes, they'll likely stay brown. If she's born with steel gray or dark blue eyes, they may stay gray or blue or turn green, hazel, or brown by the time she's 9 months old.

That's because a child's irises (the colored part of the eye) may gain more pigment in the months after she's born, but they won't get "lighter" or more blue. (Green, hazel, and brown eyes have more pigment than gray or blue eyes.)

### **Terry's dad died yesterday (2008-01-25 14:01)**

Jan. 26 update: A memorial service for Forry is being planned for late February.

Jan. 25: Some sad news to report...Terry's dad, Forry, passed away yesterday. I believe he was at his home in Salem, Oregon. Forry has lived through a somewhat stunning list of medical problems, and I kind of think we were all under the impression that he just must be immortal. Terry's mom, Topsy, has been doing a tremendous amount of care for Forry over the last ten years. I believe the last time they came out to Wisconsin was for my wedding in 1999.

I've always considered Topsy and Forry another set of grandparents, and it really feels like a huge era is passing to know that Forry is gone.

I hope he is now freed from the confines of an aged body.

Terry is heading out to Oregon to be with his mom and his brother, Michael. I'd like to be able to join them, but there is no traveling when one is 38 weeks pregnant! I'll post an obituary when one is available.

**A painted belly (2008-01-26 14:52)**



Jan. 26: My dear friend Anne came over this afternoon...driving all the way from Milwaukee on a snowy Saturday to paint my big belly.

Anne painted my belly a few days before Andrew was born (see a photo here), and she has bedecked the bellies of a slew of other friends in the past several years. It's a fun way to honor and commemorate my largely enhanced size, and the baby seemed to be tickled by the light brush strokes.

We decided on a snowy/starry night theme, and it turned out really well. Anne is such a fun friend! Photos for those who enjoy such things are in the gallery:)

**Not a manic Monday (2008-01-28 19:33)**

Jan. 28: No real news to report today. Andrew and I attended our first-ever story hour, and I sat around feeling big and somewhat uncomfortable. I also re-arranged several dresser drawers in my continued effort to have the house completely organized before the little one arrives. The weather has warmed up significantly. It looks like it doesn't even matter that we never shoveled the walk ways after last weekend's snow fall since it all melted off today. I realized this morning that I can now legitimately tell people that the baby is due next week (Feb. 8 -

a week from Friday). Wow. I think I want her to wait until February, but I also really want to get this show on the road!

### **Visiting Grandma (2008-01-29 19:27)**

Jan. 29: I'm feeling pretty snoozy this evening. It's been a blustery, cold, wet, and snowy day today. An interesting mix of fog, rain, hail, and snow, just to keep life interesting.

Andrew is currently lying on the floor with Bryan listening to the music from Fantasia. He's saying, "I'm scared, I'm scared..." as he listens to the dinosaur segment. Bryan's being sweet and saying calming things.

We drove down to Monore this morning to visit my grandma. She's living at a nursing home as she recovers from a broken hip. Poor Grandma really seemed pretty sad. I think a visit from the cutest little guy and patting an enormous belly helped to lift her spirits, though. And now, we're off for a quiet wintery evening at home.

### **Fun with Friends (2008-01-31 14:26)**

Jan. 31: Our week is going really well. This period between when I stopped work and the baby arriving is a lot of fun. Andrew and I have been enjoying outings or visiting with friends in the morning and then napping (or not) and making dinner in the afternoons. Right now, the little fellow is in his bed reading books out loud. And today, that's alright with me as long as he is cheerful this afternoon/evening:)

Bryan's mom arrives in just two days. She'll be here with us until Feb. 16...hopefully the little one will make her entrance on or before her due date so that Andrew can enjoy an extra adult's loving attentions for a while. If not, we'll just roll with that situation too:)

We got together with my neighbor, Kathy, and her daughters, Alivia and Rayna yesterday. Andrew had a great time and was talking about what we did at their house for the whole rest of the day. This morning, we met Jessica, Eli, and Celia at the library for some play time, and then we went to Manna Cafe for lunch with my co-workers. It feels so nice to spend time with friends. I really miss seeing my Gathering Waters pals every day, and my heart feels a little cozier for having shared a meal with them today.

Hope all is well in your world!

### **Vacuum terror (2008-01-31 14:32)**

Jan. 31: Andrew may not appreciate me sharing this with the world, but I found it to be so earnest and tender that I just wanted to write it down.

Andrew feels very afraid when he hears loud noises: coffee grinders, blenders, lawn mowers, and especially the vacuum cleaner. This morning, I wanted to vacuum up the hallway carpet a bit. Andrew was playing with puzzles in the living room, and when I came over to tell him I was going to pull out the vacuum for a few minutes, he got really panicky. He started breathing fast and then started crying and trying to pick up all his puzzles at once. I promised

him (as I always do) that the vacuum won't hurt him. It helps Mommy clean, and it just makes a lot of noise while it does it.

Eventually, I calmed him down, and he went into his room clutching three of his toys, mumbling something about "saving them." When I peeked into his bedroom after vacuuming the hall, he was on his bed with his toys under his blankets. Oh, he is so cute I just want to eat him up:)

### **Forry's obituary (2008-01-31 16:06)**

Jan. 31: Terry is back in Madison after spending the last week in Salem with his mom. A memorial service is planned for February 23, the week of Forry's 93rd birthday. An obituary follows, which can also be found on the Salem Statesman Journal's website.

#### Forrest M. Haller Obituary

SALEM - Forrest M. ("Forry")

Haller, 92, died peacefully at home on January 24, 2008. Forry was born on February 20, 1915 in Arnegard, North Dakota to Adolph I. and Della A. (nee Rohney) Haller. The family moved to Red Wing, Minnesota in 1922. In 1932, he graduated from Red Wing High School. Several years later, he went west and eventually found a job with Northrop Aircraft in Los Angeles. Over the next 25 years, with a hiatus during 1945-49, Forry rose to head Northrop's production engineering operations, and he was General Supervisor of Missile Planning there. He worked on numerous Northrop projects, including the YB-49 Flying Wing airplane (a precursor of the B-2 Stealth Bomber) and the SM-62 Snark missile. Forry was married to Thelma ("Topsy") Arstill on October 22, 1945, and they moved to Palm Springs, California, where they helped to build and manage the White Sun Guest Ranch in Rancho Mirage. In 1947-9, they lived in Portland, Oregon before returning to L.A. From 1951 on, they lived in Manhattan Beach and Los Alamitos, California before retiring to Salem, Oregon in 1972. Forry is survived by his very special wife Topsy, to whom he was married for over 62 years; two sons, Terry L. Haller of Madison, Wisconsin and Michael D. Haller of Salem, Oregon; one grandson, Christopher W. Haller in his senior year at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington; and two brothers, Donald M. Haller of Salem, Oregon and Deane A. Haller of Red Wing, Minnesota. He was preceded in death by his father, Adolph Haller in 1940, his stepfather Fred Gerdes in 1964, his mother Della (Rohney) Gerdes in 1972 and his brother Lyndon W. Haller (wife Lela) in 1999. A memorial service will take place at 2:00PM on Saturday, February 23, 2008 at the First Presbyterian Church, 770 Chemeketa Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97301.

## **4.2 February**

### **Com'on, Baby...we're ready for you! (2008-02-03 14:01)**

X Feb. 3: Andrew is on day three of his no-napping game. Hmmmm. I don't think I approve:)

Bryan's mom came into town yesterday. Her plane was able to land only after getting diverted to Iowa for more fuel since the runways were covered in snow and it had to circle for a while before getting cleared.

I had my week 39 midwife appointment on Friday. We got to hear the baby's heart beat and she measured my belly.



No signs of imminent labor, but I'm sending the baby lots of positive messages that the world is a friendly place and she should go ahead and check it out. Please proceed to the exit, little one:)

We got together this morning for brunch with Andrew's little friends Alex and Budgy and their parents, Vicki and Mike and Veronica and Benson. It was a fun time. This afternoon, we're heading to Sarah and Wes' house to watch the super bowl and eat yummy food.

BabyCenter.com

How your baby's growing:

Your baby's waiting to greet the world! He continues to build a layer of fat to help control his body temperature after birth, but it's likely he already measures about 20 inches and weighs a bit over 7 pounds, a mini watermelon. (Boys tend to be slightly heavier than girls.) The outer layers of his skin are sloughing off as new skin forms underneath.

#### **It hurts my heart (2008-02-04 15:54)**



Feb. 4: I wrote a post a couple weeks ago our how my friend Karen's friend Cindy was at the end of a five year struggle with breast cancer. This morning, Cindy passed away. She was at the hospice center where Mom was at the end. My heart grieves for Karen and for Cindy's husband and kids and all the people who love her. It's five months since Mom died. It feels so weird to have death be something that I know on a much more intimate basis that I have ever before. And at the same time to be right in the moment where life is beginning. There's a lot more to this rich tapestry of life than I knew three years ago. I want to take it all in and accept it and make it OK.

Karen made a nice page on her website for Cindy.

#### **Waiting, waiting (2008-02-05 16:51)**

Feb. 5: It's been a quiet day here. I think I've done nearly all the planning and preparations I can think of, so I found myself sitting around this morning in a bit of a funk. Fortunately, I had lunch plans with Karen, so that got me out of the house. I ran some errands, did some shopping for Andrew and for the little one, and in general enjoyed being out and about on my own. Andrew took a three-hour nap for his granny today, so she got some quiet time here in the afternoon.

We're experiencing the start of a major snow event here. Laura, my doula, called this afternoon to see if we were seeming to be heading toward labor (no) and to remind me to give extra time for her to come over and for us all to get to the hospital since the weather may be pretty difficult.

Baby girl continues to move about, but doesn't seem to be in much of a hurry. I told her that life out here in the world is pretty good.

Sure, it's a little bright and a little cold, but there's good things like milk and snuggling, and my darling dear, there are shoes!

### **Snug inside during the storm (2008-02-06 16:42)**

Feb. 6: Wow...we got a huge snowfall today. I'll be thankful that the little miss stayed quiet today, because it would have been quite a mess to try to get to the hospital through this blizzard.

LuAnn and one of our great neighbors shoveled out much of the driveway. I bet LuAnn didn't imagine she'd be shoveling 18" snow as part of her helping-us-out activities this trip!

I stayed pretty mellow today. Ended up taking two naps, took a long bath, and just hung out. Thanks for everyone out there who's thinking of us!

### **Cute things Andrew is doing (2008-02-07 19:32)**

Feb. 7: Andrew has said a number of super-cute things in the last week, and I need to write them down before the memories flutter away.

#### **Pirates**

The other morning, Bryan was talking to Andrew in pirate talk. "Avast ye squab! Ye be eat'en your orange or yeh be walking the plank!"

Andrew looked earnestly at Bryan and said, "Don't scare me. I'm just a little boy!" After laughing, Bryan said, "Alright then, wee lad, if yeh don't want to walk the plank, I'll just make yeh me first mate.

Have a parrot." Andrew placed the imaginary parrot on his shoulder and said, "He's a little parrot!"

#### **Tiger**

In the mornings, Andrew likes to come in bed to cuddle. Then he crawls down to the foot of the bed under the covers and starts to growl. When we ask what kind of fierce creature is in our bed, he calls out, "I am a Bengal Bengal Tiger!" Eventually, after some coaxing, he crawls back out and proceeds to eat us. "mumumumummm"

#### **Dancing**

Andrew has a play saxophone, and he and Granny have been dancing for probably hours to some of the songs it plays. Then they lie down on the floor and Andrew becomes a bouncy pillow for Granny to rest on.

#### **Secrets**

The other night after dinner, Andrew leaned conspiratorially over to Bryan and said in hushed tones, "I have a secret. We could do play-doh."

#### **Story Hour**

We've been to story hour at the Pinney branch library for the last couple weeks, and it's so fun to watch Andrew. He's really reserved, but he's paying such close attention. Even though it takes a little coaxing to encourage him to move along with the songs, he talks about them for days afterward. And during the reading of stories, he actively listens even when all the other kids are racing around the room.

## We've reached my "due date" (2008-02-08 14:11)

Feb. 8: Well, here we are! I think that since Andrew came five days early, I really had it in my mind that this baby would come early too. I go to bed each night hoping that I'll wake up in labor, but I keep sleeping through the night! Each meal I wonder if it's my last pre-baby meal, but nothing has happened yet. My 20 week ultrasound put the due date at Feb. 14 rather than the 8th, so there's always the possibility that the baby isn't even actually late yet. Yet, the waiting...especially knowing how the risks to the baby increase as time goes by...isn't super easy!

Bryan and I sat together and talked to the baby a lot as she had a rollicking party in my belly. Hard to imagine that we're so close to holding her:)

I had my 40 week midwife appointment. She did an ultrasound to confirm again that the head was down and to make sure that the baby had a good amount of amniotic fluid. Baby's heart rate was good, and she was pretty active. I continue to have lots of non-painful contractions, but there's not much sign of progress toward labor. But you never know...maybe tonight!

From BabyCenter.com

### How your baby's growing:

It's hard to say for sure how big your baby will be, but the average newborn weighs about 7 1/2 pounds (a small pumpkin) and is about 20 inches long. His skull bones are not yet fused, which allows them to overlap a bit if it's a snug fit through the birth canal during labor.

This so-called "molding" is the reason your baby's noggin may look a little conehead-ish after birth. Rest assured — it's normal and temporary.

### How your life's changing:

After months of anticipation, your due date rolls around, and... you're still pregnant. It's a frustrating, but common, situation in which to find yourself. You may not be as late as you think, especially if you're relying solely on a due date calculated from the day of your last period because sometimes women ovulate later than expected. Even with reliable dating, some women have prolonged pregnancies for no apparent reason.

You still have a couple of weeks before you'll be considered "post-term." But to be sure your baby is still thriving, your practitioner will schedule you for testing to keep an eye on her if your pregnancy continues.

You may have a biophysical profile (BPP), which consists of an ultrasound to look at your baby's overall movements, breathing movements (movement of her chest muscles and diaphragm), and muscle tone (whether she opens and closes her hand or extends and then flexes her limbs), as well as the amount of amniotic fluid that surrounds her (important because it's a reflection of how well the placenta is supporting your baby).

### Fetal heart rate

monitoring (called a nonstress test or NST) will generally be done as well — by itself or as part of the BPP. Or, you may have what's known as a modified BPP, which consists of an NST and an ultrasound to assess the amount of amniotic fluid.

If the fetal testing isn't reassuring — the amniotic fluid level is too low, for example — you'll be induced. If there's a serious, urgent problem, you may have an immediate c-section.

Your practitioner will also check your cervix to see if it's "ripening." Its position, how soft it is, how effaced

(thinned out) it is, and how dilated (open) it is can all affect when and how your labor is induced. If you don't go into labor on your own, you'll be induced, usually sometime between 41 and 42 weeks.

#### **Our week in pictures (2008-02-09 09:17)**



Feb. 9: We're getting ready to go to Kids in the Rotunda for some story and songs this morning, but first I thought I'd upload some pictures of Andrew from the last week. They're ready for viewing in the gallery.

#### **Burr...hanging out (2008-02-10 12:13)**

Feb. 10: It's chilly here in Madison today. I think the thermometer is hovering around -10! Michael and Lisa came over for a waffle breakfast this morning, and Bryan and I are thinking about heading out to the mall to walk around for a while. It's just not a day that I feel like walking around outside!

LuAnn is putting Andrew down for his afternoon nap, and I'm calmly hoping to go into labor. I was having some mild contractions through the night last night, but when I got up in the morning, they stopped.

I'm taking that as a good sign that my body is heading toward labor.

Thanks to everyone who has called and written with wonderfully supportive and loving thoughts. I feel like we're wrapped in a warm community of support.

Stay inside today!

**She's here and all is well! (2008-02-11 05:12)**

Feb. 11: I've so been wanting to write a post like this! Our sweet little girl was born last night around 1 am. The labor was powerful, and positive. We're still confirming a name for the little one, and we haven't gotten much sleep this evening (it's now 6 am), but I'm so full of joy and excitement that I'm having a hard time sleeping:)

I felt so loved and supported through this whole pregnancy...especially this last week of wait, wait waiting. Thanks for being part of the circle of people who is welcoming out little one into the world.

Jessica shared a song with me last week that was so poignant that it made me sob to listen to. If this baby news makes your emotional barometer go haywire, listen to this wonderful song for a little push over the edge. It's song 6 - Welcome to this world.

With love,

Althea

## Introducing Sylvia! (2008-02-11 16:18)



Feb. 11: We settled on her name, Sylvia Dotzour this morning. No middle name for this little miss. In my mind, her "silent" middle name is after me and my mom...no middle names there either:)

Sylvia was born at 12:55 am on Monday, February 11, 2008. She was 7 lbs, 9 oz and 19 inches long. Labor lasted about eight hours. It's hard to believe that 24 hours ago was when I was really starting to go into labor! And now she's here:)

Andrew got to meet Sylvia this morning. He came in bearing some cut out cookies that he and Granny made. His interactions with his sister were so sweet. Bryan encouraged him to sing her a song, so he did a boisterous rendition of "Old McDonald Had a Farm." Before leaving, he also sang her "Rock-a-Bye Baby." We gave Andrew the Bitty Baby that my mom had picked out for him as a big brother present. He really liked how its eyes opened and shut.

The little one has been nursing well and sleeping lots on this first day. Photos of her and of our steady stream of visitors are in the gallery.

## My little Valentine (2008-02-14 20:42)



Feb. 14: Happy Valentine's Day! I'd intended to post loads of new photos this morning as a Valentine's Day treat for everyone, but I entered a new state of exhaustion and just didn't have the energy. I wonder why? We came home from the hospital on Tuesday afternoon, and it's felt great to be back at home. Bryan's mom has been terrific...I've been so pampered and catered to these last few days.

What a treat!

Sylvia's main interests right now are eating, sleeping, and eating.

Last night, I think she nursed or was asleep while nursing almost all night. Unfortunately, that meant that I didn't get as much sleep.

Today we've found that if we can amuse her (jiggling, walking, swaddling, holding) for a while, she'll eat a full meal and then sleep for a couple hours. I'm hoping to employ that technique tonight to try to get a couple hours of solid sleep!

Andrew has been doing really well. He's having a blast playing with Granny and Daddy, and he's so sweet about wanting to hold or kiss or look at baby Sylvia. I just love that boy:)

Sylvia had her first doctor's appointment today, so Bryan and I made our first foray into the world since our drive home on Tuesday. Sylvia is back up to her birth weight (7 lbs, 9 oz), and she passed all the healthy baby tests.

She's currently sleeping on my chest while I type, and her little fingers are curled around the edge of my shirt. I've uploaded new pictures to the gallery, so enjoy!



**Settling in (2008-02-15 10:55)**



Feb. 15: It's a sunny morning, and the world is feeling a little clearer to me. Sylvia has been napping for longer stretches - during the day she's been asleep for nearly three hours. At night, I don't think she's gone for more than about 1 1/2 hours of sleeping at a stretch. One major improvement since the prior nights is that last night she would eat for 10 -20 minutes and then go back to sleep rather than just pretty much nurse constantly. That gave me the opportunity to get some much-needed sleep:)

This morning she's been snuggling in her little chair under her beautiful, soft pink blanket from my Aunt Kate. Andrew spent much of the morning listening to a Fantasia 2000 CD we got him for Valentine's Day. He just loves Fantasia, and it's neat to sit with him, curled up under the blankets and talk about what is happening during each part of the music. He gets a far-away look in his eyes, and you can just tell that he is visualizing it all in his head. "What happening now?" is his oft-repeated question. He likes to be held during the scary parts and sometimes sings along or clucks his tongue in time to the music. What a neat kid:)

Sunshine and sleep. A good combination, I think!

I just copied all the photos that Granny Lu took over the last couple weeks, and I added them to the last few albums in the gallery. Enjoy!

**We're on our own...** (2008-02-16 16:08)



Feb. 16: Little Sylvia is sleeping on my lap, and Bryan and Andrew are in the kitchen playing with Play doh. Granny Lu flew home this afternoon...a very bumpy, exciting trip, I hear...and now we're on our own. It was so very nice to have her staying here with us these last couple weeks. And this last week since Sylvia has been here, it's been just amazingly wonderful to have a third adult in the house. She worked really hard on our behalf, and I know that Bryan and I both feel so very grateful.

I got a bit more sleep last night, and I woke up this morning feeling the best I have all week (barring perhaps the euphoric day Sylvia was born). Sore muscles are improving, and the world feels like a good place:) Maretta and Kyle drove down from St. Paul yesterday to meet their new little niece. It's such fun to introduce Sylvia to the world!

Andrew has been asking to hold and kiss Sylvia a lot, and yesterday when he went down for his nap, he told Bryan that he was "going to dream about baby Sylvia." Before Bryan's mom left today, we had Michael, Lisa, Terry, Maretta, and Kyle over for breakfast. They brought treats from a new patisserie on the square called Sucre.

Mmmmmmm.

Bryan has all of next week off work, and he is planning on working only mornings the following week. So now begins a new chapter of our life. It's us and our two kids. Wow. Such cute kids. I think my lips are going to get worn out from kissing them both so much.

Pictures from the last couple days are in the gallery.

### **Wouldn't you know... (2008-02-19 07:32)**

Feb 19: On Sunday afternoon, I was working on a post about Sylvia's name. I noticed that Windows wanted to do an automatic update, so I told it to go ahead. When I restarted the computer a bit later, all that came up was a blank, black screen telling me that a system file was corrupted and Windows could not start. Fortunately, my computer-brilliant husband took over. I don't think I am emotional centered enough this week to deal with either the loss of our web domain or with the loss of our computer. Bryan has been able to remove the hard drive from our laptop and back up (what we hope are all) the important files. Now we're going to wipe the laptop out and reinstall Windows. Geesh!

I'm typing now on our old laptop that sometimes does and sometimes does not allow you to use the "enter" and spacebar buttons. I guess it woke up on the right side of something this morning.

All is well here aside from the computer fiasco:)

### **Naming our baby (2008-02-19 07:43)**

Feb. 17: It's been so much fun these past days to look at little Sylvia and to call her by her name. I've been writing her baby announcements, and it feels sort of crazy to write her name over and over. Sylvia. Sylvia. Sylvia. We could have given her any name, but that's the one we chose. That's what people will call her for the rest of her life. It's a big thing! I have no previous context for the name Sylvia, so now I'm creating the association with this new little member of our family.

Joe did a post on his blog with musings about her name: <http://platosfootnotes.net/2008/02/13/sylvia/>.

I found the name in December when Bryan and I were pouring through The Baby Name Wizard book. They said, "Concentrate hard on this one. Put aside your preconceptions, close your eyes, and really listen to the name. Lovely, isn't it." In the 1910s, it was #73 in popularity. These days it is #561...pretty uncommon. I think the nickname Sylvie is really cute. And I like spelling it with a "y" since Bryan is spelled with a "y."

I think my favorite part of the name is that it means "from the forest." So there's a lovely link to nature, and it also happens that Bryan's maternal grandpa's name is Forrest. To me, Sylvia makes me think of a quiet forest painted lavender in the moonlight.

According to one of my mom's name books, "Sylvia is from the Latin silvanus, meaning 'forest.' In Roman mythology, Silvanus is the god of the woods and fields. Silvia is variant spelling. In ancient times, Sylvia was a favorite name for a shepherdess."

When I did some web research on the name, here are some fun things I found:

There was a good discussion on the Baby Name Wizard discussion board about why Sylvia hasn't become more popular in recent years.: <http://thebabynamewizard.ivillage.com/parenting/archives/2007/11/who-is-sylvi>

a.html

Here's a poem by William Shakespeare to a Sylvia of alternate spelling:

Who is Silvia? What is she?

That all our swains commend her?

Holy, fair, and wise is she;

The heaven such grace did lend her,

That she might admired be.

Is she kind as she is fair?

For beauty lives with kindness:

Love doth to her eyes repair,

To help him of his blindness;

And, being help'd, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,

That Silvia is excelling;

She excels each mortal thing

Upon the dull earth dwelling:

To her let us garlands bring.

## What Andrew thinks of his new sister (2008-02-20 20:19)



Feb. 20: Andrew thinks that his new little sister is pretty wonderful. When he met her in the hospital, I suggested that he touch her on the nose (Granny wisely had suggested a kiss on the forehead). Today he probably touched Sylvia's nose 40 times. It's his little way of checking in. "I want to touch Sylvie's nose." Fortunately, she can sleep through a gentle nose-touch. Today he bent down to kiss her forehead and then went back for two or three more kisses. She's very kissable. And Andrew isn't a boy who gives kisses too freely.

Yesterday, Andrew was prancing around the house singing to the tune of "Mary had a little lamb" "Where did little Sylvie go, Sylvie go, Sylvie go? Where did little Sylvie go? I want to see her." And he pronounces "little" "widdle," so it's especially enduring.

Before his nap earlier this week, I asked Andrew what he thought he would dream about today. "I'm going to dream about Baby Sylvia," he said.

And today as we were leaving the house, I asked him who was in our family. "Daddy," he said, "and Mommy and Andrew and Sylvia." I think he has the new family member thing figured out. I feel so lucky to have two so amazingly sweet babies.

**Getting out as a family of four (2008-02-20 20:36)**



Feb. 20: There's a lunar eclipse going on right now. It's really amazing looking. We showed it to Andrew and told him that people used to think that a dragon was eating the moon. Afterward, he kept asking where the dragon was:)

We've had some nice outings this week. On Monday, I had a most incredible massage in the afternoon. I took Sylvia with me, and she got a little fussy a couple times. I had her sleeping on my chest for the second half of the massage, and it turned out to be a really peaceful and centering experience. A little life lesson in how to tend to one's self as well as one's family.

Yesterday was my first just-for-fun outing. I put on my contacts and jeans and some makeup and the four of us went to Olbrich Gardens to walk in the conservatory. It felt good to be out in public. My body feels nearly back to normal, well, maybe that's a bit of a stretch, but I do feel mostly like myself other than being pretty sleepy.

Today the four of us went to Mad Town Twisters gymnasium where Andrew had an absolute blast running and jumping and climbing. Sylvia slept the whole time we were there. This week is speeding on by.

My friend and co-worker, Pam, had a baby girl on Monday. Mercy Caroline. So Clara is a big sister now too. All these fresh babies.

It's enough cuteness to make a person turn to ooze.

I stayed up too late last night. I think my previous bedtime of 8:30 or 9 is much more conducive for an awake day

than the 9:30/10:30 bedtime. Sylvia is having some longer sleeping stretches (2 1/2, even a 3 hour sometimes), but she also often wakes up every hour to nurse.

She sure is cuddly in the bed, my little sweetie.

I'm going to try to upload some pictures, but I have to re-install programs to do so. Bryan has our computer up and running again, but there's lots of little things that need tweaking to get them working!

Photos from the last several days are in the gallery.

### **Shoes? (2008-02-21 15:51)**

Feb. 21: When Bryan and I went out to Olbrich the other day, I packed my diaper bag/purse with essentials for the first time. It was quite a mental exercise. Nursing supplies for me, check; diapers for Andrew, check; diapers for Sylvia, check; extra outfit and blanket for Sylvia in case of a diaper blowout, check; crackers and sippy cup for Andrew, check; camera, check; cell phone - charged, check.

Bryan got Andrew bundled up, and he led him out to the car while I got Sylvia in her seat. It wasn't until I was walking out toward the car that I realized that I still had on my slippers - and no socks.

Oops.

### **Grandma Babler's recent diagnosis (2008-02-22 18:24)**

Feb. 22: Some unwelcome news has come out of Monroe today. My grandma (my dad's mom) was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Poor grandma has been through so much these past months. My grandpa died in late October. In December, Grandma's osteoporosis got the upper hand, and her hip broke. Since then, she's undergone surgery and been living in a rehabilitation center. She fell again a couple weeks ago, but didn't seem to break anything.

My dear grandma hasn't had much to feel hopeful about these days. It's been a hard winter for her. Dad gets down to see her a couple times each week and is working hard to keep her spirits up and her life in order. In the last couple days, doctors were concerned with some of her bloodwork, so they did further testing. Hence the new finding of cancer.

I've got to think that one of the last things my dad needs in his life is more visits with oncologists. Appointments are scheduled next week to follow-up on the CT scan she had today. From there, we'll determine if surgery is an option. Grandma is already so frail.

We're going to try to get down to Monroe this weekend to share some baby- and Andrew-love with her.



**What day is it, again? (2008-02-23 13:02)**



Feb. 23: I have utterly lost track of what day of the week it is. I haven't forgotten that it is winter, but that's only because of the pervasiveness of the snow. Bryan has been off work for the last couple weeks, and our days and nights all blend together. It's been a good last week here in the Dotzour home, so I guess knowing the date is just one of those things I've decided don't matter right now.

Bryan heads back to work next week, but he's only working in the mornings. He should be home in the afternoons, so that should be a nice transition. Bryan's mom and dad and Melanie and Ben fly into town next Friday, and LuAnn is staying until Tuesday. Then my friend Grace is coming into town on Wednesday, March 5 and staying through the weekend. Then Joe will be home from Bowdoin until March 23. Maretta will be home as well from March 14-23, so I imagine that there will be lots of opportunities to have another adult around.

On Thursday, I did my first trip solo with both kids. It was pretty low-key...I took them to Gathering Waters to have lunch with my co-workers. Vicki arrived the same time I did, so I even had help getting all my stuff in the building. Karen held Sylvia the whole time - and she loved it.

Yesterday I ended up staying in my pajamas all day long, which was mostly nice, but I kind of felt like a human milk supplier/pillow for the littlest one. Sylvia vastly prefers to sleep on a person than in her chair. And in general, I think she deserves whatever makes her happiest. I hope the magazines I got at the library today will help give my brain something to do during the sweet hours spent with the little one.

Today Sylvia had her first restaurant experience. We went to Rocky's, where Andrew ordered a slice of pizza "with pepperoni and sausage, but no mushrooms." When did he grow up?

We are planning a trip to Monroe to see Grandma tomorrow morning, and at this point, we're enjoying a quiet and sunny wintery Saturday. see, I now know the date:) Pictures from the last couple days are in the gallery.

### **These are the days of our lives (2008-02-26 13:23)**

Feb. 26: I think Sylvia is starting to look a bit older. I can't quite pinpoint where the changes are happening, but she doesn't look as newbornish to me as she did last week. Yesterday was her two-week birthday. She's currently nestled on my chest, her long fingers gripping a handful of my shirt. I can almost hear her thinking, "Can't I nurse again while I sleep, Mom?"

She did a cluster-nursing marathon last night, starting about 6 pm and finally falling asleep for a couple hours around 8 am. I really don't think she stopped nursing for more than about a half-hour at a stretch all night. I think this is the nursing mania that proceeds the 2-3 week growth spurt. Makes for one tired mommy, though!

Fortunately, Andrew was perfectly content letting me sit on the sofa and talking him through his bird book or exclaiming as he jumped off the sofa onto a pillow 53 times.

Sylvia just decided that sleeping on me wasn't quite what she wanted. She wants, very strongly, to nurse while sleeping. She normally fusses for about 10 seconds before letting out a shriek, but this time there was no warning. It's a stunningly loud sound, somewhat reminiscent of a red-tailed hawk. OK, now she's a happier girl. Good thing I didn't have anything planned today!

On Sunday, we drove down to Monroe to see my grandma. She was happy to see Sylvia, and she held the little one in the crook of her arm for quite some time. Poor Grandma is so very frail. The skin on her hands felt almost transparent. And from the sounds of it, her recently-diagnosed stomach cancer isn't giving her much opportunity to eat or drink. As she said, it's a hard place to be. It was nice to sit with her, though, and to share Andrew and Sylvia with her.

Sunday night, Sylvia and I went to my friend Sara's house for an Oscar party. I love watching the Oscars. And now I not only have my fashion tank filled but I also have lots of new movies to add to my Netflix cue.

Yesterday was my first day home alone (but just for the morning) with the kiddos. We packed up and went to the Pinney library branch story hour. A good way to spend some time. I took advantage of my at-home day today by baking a couple loaves of whole-wheat bread. It's a new recipe that I got from one of LuAnn's friends. So far, I give the dough some big thumbs up:)

Bryan just got home for the afternoon, and I'm going to take Sylvia in for her two-week appointment in a bit here. Have a good day!

### **Not good news about my grandma (2008-02-26 20:18)**

Feb. 26: You know, as I typed the title of this post, I realized that I was applying a parenting technique of my mom's. She made a point of not using the word "bad" in regards to us...even in regards to our behavior. Instead, she would say "not good" or "not appropriate" or some such phrase. The idea is to focus on what you want (good or appropriate behavior) as opposed to pointing out the negative.

Anyway, there's some negative to report from Grandma's meeting with the oncologist today. Turns out that her stomach cancer has pretty much blocked her lower stomach, so food isn't able to make its way to her intestines. She was hospitalized again on Sunday. The oncologist said that her tumor isn't operable, even if she was much younger and more robust, and chemo or radiation would not be effective.

So now, quite suddenly, Grandma is looking at an end-of-life situation. Dad and Aunt Julie are trying to decide whether to move her home with 24 hour nursing care or to move her to the Hospice center in Madison.

When I think of my grandma, I think of a quiet, loving woman who tries to live her life as responsibly as possible. Her

religious devotion is deep and really rather impressive. I love making Grandma smile. Best of all is making Grandma laugh. That really makes me feel good partly because it isn't too easy. The fact that I've gotten her laughing hard a couple times is one of my big accomplishments in life:) I love Grandma's cooking. Her meals are the staple of our holidays, and I fully associate the taste of her cooking with family and love.

My grandpa died in October, and it's hard to believe that we're looking at the real possibility that in the near future, I won't have grandparents living in Monroe anymore. And my poor dad will be planning another funeral.

As Terry said after being at his dad's memorial service in Oregon last weekend, "Between you and me, I'm all deathed out." Agreed. In the meantime, I am going to think through what kinds of things I can do to brighten Grandma's days while she's still here with us.

### **She's growing! (2008-02-28 07:37)**



Feb. 28: Sylvia had her two-week doctor's appointment on Tuesday. She weighed in at 8 lbs, 10 oz and was 21.25 inches long.

That's up a pound and an increase of 2.25 inches in two weeks! She is in the 50th percentile for height and head circumference and the 25th percentile for weight. Her pediatrician thinks that she's pretty cute:)

My friend Janelle brought us a delicious dinner on Tuesday. My mom friends have organized and are taking turns bringing us dinner every Tuesday and Thursday through March. What a wonderful and yummy treat!

Andrew has continued to say enduring things about Sylvia that make me melty. Earlier this week, he turned to me and said, "Mommy, Sylvia is my best friend." I think something inside me popped. Then this morning, he came to our bed and saw Sylvia all curled up next to me.

He said, "Aaawweee, Mommy, Sylvia is soooo cuuute!" Followed up by, "Can we touch her widdle nooose?" I've posted some photos from the last few days in the gallery.

### 4.3 March

Cuteness captured (2008-03-03 14:56)



March 3: Melanie and Ben were visiting us this weekend, and they left us with a wonderful loan...their lovely SLR digital camera complete with it's super-cool flash attachment. I had a blast taking pictures of the kiddos in the last couple days. Oh, they are so cute!

Pics-of-wonderfulness are in the gallery.

**Great visit with Grandad, Granny, Melanie, and Ben (2008-03-04 14:00)**



March 4: We're just back from having dropped Granny Lu off at the airport. We had a wonderful visit with Mark and LuAnn and Ben and Melanie from Thursday through Sunday. Then LuAnn stayed until today to give me some extra Andrew-care while I buzzed about town with Sylvie.

It was so fun to introduce Sylvia to her family. It's amazing that we're all just meeting her for the first time, and yet she is going to be such an important person in all our lives from here on. The weather was cold for our Texan family members, but they braved the elements and headed out into the yard to build a snowman. The snow wasn't that cooperative, so they ended up adding a snowman head to the top of a large pile of snow. It turned out really cute. Bryan's mom gave us a beautiful quilt that she's been working on these past months. It's purple and yellow and just wonderful. I want to look at it all the time.

[Side note: Sylvia woke from what should have been a long nap and was very fussy. So I just sat her in her chair and turned on the loud fan above the oven. Now she's either asleep or totally content. Wow. White noise does work!]

Andrew loved playing with some of his favorite people these last days. He just adores his family. And they must adore him too, given how willingly they play the games he wants to play over and over and over and over again!

Pictures of our weekend are in the gallery. Also, for a fun comparison, check out the pictures from Andrew's third week in the summer of 2005.



**Twisting with Grace (2008-03-07 08:22)**



March 7: Wow...it's already Friday! Bryan's mom flew back to Texas on Tuesday (and she called this morning to say that it was in the 30s and snowing in College Station!). Then Andrew and Sylvia and I were on our own Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday. We even did a solo trip to Woodman's! Wednesday late afternoon, my dear friend Grace flew in from DC to help us and spend time with us until Sunday.

We've been having a good time together:) Yesterday we went to Madtown Twisters again, and Andrew had a wonderful time jumping and swinging and running about on all the gymnastic equipment.

My Happy Bambino mom's group has been providing us with dinners every Tuesday and Thursday night for the last couple weeks, and the delicious meals are going to continue coming to our door twice a week through March. What a pampering treat! And it's so wonderful not to have to think about dinner. Since Sylvia really most prefers to sleep on me, it makes it easier to just sit and be her pillow knowing that dinner will be provided.

Grace has been a big help with Andrew, and it's a lot of fun to just be spending time together these last couple days. I think today we'll do an outing to the library.

Photos from the last week are in the gallery.

**Grandma is gone (2008-03-10 19:56)**



March 10: I got a call from my dad this evening with news that my grandma passed away this afternoon. Her 86th birthday is tomorrow.

Dad was with her as were two of his siblings, my Aunt Julie and Uncle Scott. She declined much more quickly than we thought she would, but perhaps that was a blessing for her. I've been trying to get my head around the fact that she's gone. It's a really odd feeling to have these people who have always been such constants in life be gone.

Since Mom, we've lost Bryan's grandpa, Dandy; my grandpa; Terry's dad, Forry; and now my grandma. I've had enough. Looking at little Sylvia's tiny hands and feet and newborn movements, it's amazing to think that she's at the beginning of the life cycle that Grandma has just ended. I'm really glad they were able to meet.



**Sylvia is one month old!** (2008-03-10 20:06)



March 10: Sylvia is four weeks old today. And tomorrow is her one-month birthday. She's getting to be so beautiful, and her eyes are seeing more and more of the world every day. Happy birthday, little sweetie!

In other news, a gray hair has been spotted sprouting from the top of my head.

Neither Sylvia nor Andrew napped today, our first full solo day together. And Sylvia cried or needed to be jollied nearly the entire day. Why am I still awake at 10 pm? I wanted some "me" time. And I needed to digest the turtle sunday that Terry brought over for dessert. Mmm turtle sundays...

And right now both children are sleeping, and I sort of want to be awake to relish the wonderfulness of it all.

Andrew said so many adorable things today that I wanted to pop. He pointed out all the parts about Sylvia that he loved. "And I wove her widdle hands and her teeny tiny widdle fingers. And I wove her eyes (he says while poking them) and her ears and her hair (he says while kissing it) and I wove wove her widdle nose."

Later he turned to Sylvia and said, "I can't wait until you grow bigger and we can play!"

He's such a great big brother, I almost wish he were my big brother:)

Pictures are in the gallery.

## Grandma's obituary (2008-03-14 16:25)



March 14: Aunt Julie and Dad (and others!) have been hard at work planning Grandma's funeral so it can be a good celebration of her life. My cousin Max is putting together a slide show, and I went through my digital photos to look for some images to share. These pictures are now in my gallery. Grandma's obituary follows below...

MONROE - Lucille Evelyn Babler, 86 (less 7 hours), died peacefully on March 10, 2008, at the Monroe Manor Nursing Home, Monroe, Wisconsin. She became a resident there in mid-December while she recovered from hip-replacement surgery. In late February while still recovering, she was unexpectedly diagnosed with stomach cancer and became a patient of Hospice.

Lucille was born on March 11, 1922, in Deaconess Hospital in Monroe, Wisconsin, to Herman and Helen (nee Kelly) Krueger. She attended Countryside elementary school until the third grade, St. Victor's from third through eighth grade, and graduated from Monroe High School in 1940. Lucille was married to Myron Jacob Babler, also of Monroe. She has four children, seven grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren.

As a child, Lucille wanted to be a ballerina. While she didn't realize that dream, her life became a dance that expressed a profound story—filled with serious challenges, moments of great joy, and many personal achievements. Her husband, her family, her friends, and her church provided the music to which she danced. She quietly wove a wonderful life story, and her ability to meet life's challenges was a testament to her strength and character.

When she was eight years old, her mother contracted tuberculosis, which eventually institutionalized her. This occurred during the Depression era, and she and her four younger siblings were too much for her farm-worker father to handle alone. As was common at the time, relatives helped to raise the children.

Blanche and Henry Rinehardt of Monroe asked Lucille to live with them. Henry was a carpenter, and they lived on a small rural farm on Smock Valley Road with one cow for milk and hand-churned butter and chickens for eggs and meat. Their home was lit by kerosene lamps and heated by a wood-burning furnace. Water came from a hand-pumped well, cooking was by wood stove, and the bathroom was the outhouse. The radio ran on an old car battery and was always tuned to WLS for the “Barn Dance” on Saturday nights. The Rinehardts treated Lucille as their daughter, were good to her, and protected her. Their daughter, Celeste, became her lifelong friend, and when Celeste married, Lucille was in high school and lived with her.

Rinehardt’s farm was located about a mile from Monroe, and Lucille walked to St. Victor’s school most every school day. On the weekends she loved to go to movies or roller-skating with her Aunt Mert and friends Charlene and Gen, and she often stayed with her Grandma Kelly overnight. If they didn’t have enough money to continue skating on Sunday, they’d watch from the balcony.

Lucille visited her mother Helen at Pinehurst Sanitarium in Janesville until her mother’s death in 1940. They sat in a room with the windows opened and couldn’t hug or touch each other. Helen did her best to advise her, but the situation was hard for both of them.

Helen was spiritual and wanted Lucille to be brought up in the faith, so Blanche was ultimately responsible for Lucille’s lifelong association with St. Victor’s Catholic Church. Lucille was baptized, received confirmation, and was married there. She loved St. Victor’s, went to church nearly every day after her children were grown, and volunteered in many ways.

Lucille met the love of her life in April 1941 when Helen Rinehardt asked her to go see a band with her and her husband Harlan, plus their friend Myron (“Mike”). Lucille had admired Mike from a distance while he worked as an usher at the Goetz Theater. Mike wasn’t pleased to have this extra girl coming along, but by the end of the evening he had changed his mind and immediately began dating her. They quickly fell in love. Unable to wait for Christmas, he proposed marriage to her hours before Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941. They were married on April 18, 1942—one year to the day after meeting.

For a short time after the wedding, they lived in Joliet, Illinois, where Mike worked at the war plant. In July 1942, Mike was drafted into the Army. She got to see him three times while he was in training: during Christmas 1942 when he came home (surviving a train derailment during the journey), in the spring of 1943 in Palacois, Texas (where they stayed in a cabin with hundreds of cockroaches), and in early fall when he came to Monroe on a three-day pass.

On Thanksgiving Day 1943, Mike called to ask her to meet him in New York City. She went and after three days of waiting for him, she received a heavily censored note saying he was quarantined on a ship. She had to leave. He shipped out to the European Theatre, and she left for Monroe.

During the war Lucille stayed with Mike’s parents, Emma and Jacob Babler, in their apartment near the square in Monroe. Emma treated her like a daughter. Lucille held a job with Lakeshire-Marty wrapping butter, and another working at the AAA office. She went to almost every movie and reconnected with her sister Naomi. They served as each other’s bridesmaids, and their friendship continued to grow.

After more than three years in the service and earning three purple hearts, Mike returned. At last they could build a life together. They moved into their own home in 1949, where they spent the rest of their lives raising their family of four and enjoying each other's company. In April 2007, they celebrated their 65th anniversary.

Lucille's children and grandchildren will remember her for her love of home and family; thoughtful, loving personality; quiet strength; great laugh (and their desire to make her laugh); ability to truly listen; famous seasonal sugar cookies; hand-decorated birthday cakes; annual handmade Christmas ornaments; sewing, knitting, and needlework; flower and vegetable gardens; her love of ginkgo trees and nature, animals and bird watching; James Herriot books and reading; an immaculately kept house; Saturday night root beer floats; her love of Perry Como, Willie Nelson, and John Denver; doing jigsaw puzzles; watching Johnny Carson; her need to "sleep on it" when it came to decision making and processing change; her rock-solid stability; her tireless work at St. Victor's counting the collections, arranging flowers, washing linens, and helping at school; her years as a Girl Scout troop leader; her thousands of hours of work with the Apostolate to the Handicapped, including helping with mailings, office work, and events; and her appreciation of the basic joys of life.

Lucille is survived by her four children: Kim Babler of Madison; Gary Babler of Stoughton; Scott (Marcia) Babler of Libertyville, Illinois; and Julie (Kevin) of California. She is also survived by her sisters, Naomi (Oliver) Miller of Brodhead and Helen Kundert of South Prairie, Washington; seven grandchildren; and nine great grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband Myron on October 30, 2007; her parents, Herman and Helen Krueger; two brothers, Max and Virgil; and her daughter-in-law Margot (nee Davis) Babler on August 31, 2007.

A visitation will take place on Sunday, March 16, at Newcomer Funeral Home, 1329 31st Avenue, Monroe, from 5-7 p.m., with a prayer service at 7 p.m. The family also invites you to a funeral to celebrate her life on Monday, March 17, at 10:45 a.m. at St. Victor's Catholic Church, 1760 14th Street, Monroe. Memorials may be made to the Diocese of Madison Apostolate to the Handicapped, 515 22nd Avenue, Box 443, Monroe, WI 53566-0443, 608-324-1000. An online obituary and guest book are available at [www.newcomerfuneralhome.net](http://www.newcomerfuneralhome.net).

**So many things to write about...so little time! (2008-03-20 13:51)**



March 20: My mental list of things to write about has been growing and growing these last days. It's 10 days since my last fun post, and I've started keeping a little slip of paper with reminders to myself about things I wanted to share. It seems though that I barely turn on the computer before Andrew needs something or Sylvia isn't cool with the idea of me trying to hold her and type simultaneously. My siblings are all in town this week, and we've been doing fun things.

Maretta and I have been doing wedding planning. We took Joe shopping for a new suit. We celebrated Michael's birthday yesterday. There's good stuff going on! And in the evenings, I am totally out of energy for anything. Oh, my poor neglected pile of thank-you cards!

I'm continuing to take lots of pictures, and there are some good ones from last week in the gallery.

Andrew is doing wonderfully as a big brother, we're getting out for walks now that our road is not a solid ice field, and Sylvia is consistently doing at least one 3 hour stretch of sleep at night.

When I started this note, Andrew was in his room for his rest time, and Sylvia was asleep. Now Andrew is taking apart a box of printer cartridges, and Sylvia is nursing as I try to type. If I don't catch the phone when you call or am long in replying to your emails, just know it's because my hands are full. Fully of fun, very active little ones!

Happy first day of spring!

Snow?! (2008-03-21 15:26)



March 21: In a continued effort to reach the 100 inches of snow mark this year, we've got loads of the white stuff falling from the sky. Enough! To get a much-needed dose of spring, Maretta, Andrew, Sylvia, and I headed to Olbrich this morning. They have their spring bulb show going on right now, so we enjoyed smelling the brightly colored flowers for a bit. Then we trekked across town to look at the proofs for some engagement pictures that Maretta and Kyle had taken the other day.

Maretta watched Andrew in the afternoon while Sylvia and I ventured out to Woodman's for a much-needed grocery run. She cried the entire time. Her cry is still so newborn-sounding, that I got lots of sympathetic looks from all the other shoppers. Maretta and I went shopping last night and found Maretta some great-looking dresses for her to wear to weddings this summer. I also got Andrew a sweater vest and shirt and tie for him to wear to Maretta's wedding in May. We also met with Nakoma Country Club to go over all the final reception details, and I'm feeling really excited about how beautiful it will all look.

Andrew helped us make his first-ever batch of Rice Krispy treats. MMmmmm

Photos from the last several days are in the gallery.



White noise (2008-03-23 14:40)



March 23: Sylvia loves white noise. She calms down right away when the vacuum cleaner or the oven fan are running, and her little soul rejoices at the sound of the tub filling with water. During her fussier times (evenings are often a hard time for a little one), Bryan or I often stand with her in front of the oven's exhaust fan, jiggling and bouncing to keep her happy. It's amazing to feel her little body relax; almost as if the loud, static-y noise is a balm for her over-stimulated systems.

I can see myself as an old woman, taking a crying baby into the kitchen and turning on a fan. "This always worked like a charm for my little ones," I'll explain.

Sylvia seems pretty attuned to noises. A dropped toy or a banging door consistently make her startle. And she's getting to the point where when she's crying and sad, she'll sometimes work her way to a state of calm if I talk to her in a low, soothing voice. How amazing it must be to be a little baby and have so much to work at and discover each day!

I just added some new pictures to the March 9-15 album and the March 16-22 album.



**Easter time, fun times (2008-03-23 15:08)**



March 23: Happy Easter! Sylvia and I are home from our Easter lunch at Terry's. Bryan and Andrew are driving Maretta up to Columbus so she can catch the train back to St. Paul. At the same time, Becky is driving Joe to Milwaukee so he can fly back to Maine. It's been just wonderful having Maretta and Joe home these last weeks. I'm sad to see them go. And really, it's not just because they are wonderful at helping to watch my kids! I think they each got lots accomplished. Maretta and I had several good meetings to finalize details for her wedding. I'm really looking forward to it! It's two months from tomorrow!

This morning, Andrew woke up to find a good collection of stuffed Easter creatures laid out. I dressed Sylvia up like an adorable Easter egg, and we took a big ham, some mashed potatoes, and the dessert left-overs from several recent get-togethers we've had to Terry's. Lisa provided vegetables and a very yummy vegetable quiche, and Becky brought a coconut cream pie. mmmm My aunt Julie and uncle Kevin drove up from Monroe (where they have been working hard to get Grandma and Grandpa's house ready to sell and divide up the estate), and so we had a full table for our Easter lunch. Andrew and Becky dyed easter eggs, and we all had a nice time.

Pictures of our Easter festivities are in the gallery.

It's still really weird to not have Mom here. The other day, someone came walking in the door, and I really thought it was her. I even turned to her to say something before I remembered. Ahh, the good old slug to the stomach. I don't know if I feel like she's close by or gone all together or if she visits sometimes or even if there's anything left other than the love and the memories we have for her. But I do know that when we're all together it makes me really happy. It makes her absence that much more obvious, but it also means that the people know knew and love her best are all together, and somehow that makes her feel closer.

We were driving home from a get-together in Monroe late last night. The moon was full, and just lovely. The fields stretched out; covered in a glistening blanket of white snow that glowed with the moon's light. Sylvia was asleep, and Andrew and I were holding hands, singing songs together. For me, things just felt right. I can't believe I've been entrusted with the care of Andrew and Sylvia. They are both so wonderful. And I know that Mom felt the same way about me and my brothers and sister. Mom poured so much of her love and herself into our family that it is seeping

its way into Andrew and Sylvia. It'll continue to grow and spread, even though she's not here to do it herself. "Love grows love" seems like a very appropriate epitaph for my mom.

### My new job (2008-03-25 13:43)



March 25: I'm typing with a sleeping (at the moment) baby slung across my lap. As is her want, she fell asleep nursing, and I should not move her if I want her to continue to sleep. Andrew is taking a nap today (thank heavens...I think it's his first one in the last seven days!!). So I can sit amidst the silence for a moment and just be still.

Today is the first day that I am home solo all day with both kids. Since my maternity leave has no end (I'm not going back to work at Gathering Waters), I kind of feel like today is the first day of my new job as full-time mom. It's been wonderful and amazing to have had help for the first six weeks of little Sylvia's life. Bryan, his mom, Grace, and my siblings have been such a huge help. This on-our-own-ness is coming at a good time. Sylvia wakes about three times in the night to eat...meaning that I'm only awake for an hour or so cumulatively. I'd love 8 uninterrupted hours, but our current system is working pretty well.

And spring is just around the corner (isn't it?!). The sandhill cranes and red wing black birds are back. The chickadees and cardinals are singing their spring songs. I'm really looking forward to all the outdoor activities I can do with the kids and with my friends this spring, summer, and fall.

This morning I pushed Andrew down to the library in his stroller. It feels good to get out and stretch my legs! (When we got out of the library, we discovered that the stroller had a flat tire, so Andrew got to walk home and stretch his legs as well. We stopped at every puddle to hop in.)

How very lucky I am to have two marvelous kids to spend my days with and such wonderful friends to play with as well. Cheers to the future!

Oh, and Happy Birthday to Joey today. He's 20!

**Smiles and cries (2008-03-27 14:45)**



March 27: Sylvia isn't very happy, so this is going to be a short post, but I had to share some of the pictures that I took of Sylvia and Andrew the other day. They are so cute!

Also, I just looked back at pictures of Andrew when he was her age (six weeks), and they look sooo much alike! See [here](#) for a flash-back to summer 2005.



### Six months (2008-03-30 20:58)

March 30: Tomorrow, March 31, is the six-month anniversary of Mom's departure. A week from Monday is Mom's 56th birthday. It's just weird. I sometimes find myself thinking of calling Mom when I'm bored or when something neat happens or when I need her advice. It's like my brain just can't remember that she's not here. On the other hand, I have found myself becoming more accustomed to not counting her when doing a head-count for family events, and that feels sort of bad too. I really don't think that I want to get too accustomed to her not being here, because then it's like I'm OK with her being gone. And I'm really not OK with it one little bit.

### An Andrew update (2008-03-30 21:30)



March 30: Andrew is constantly doing and saying things that melt my heart or just make me shake my head in wonder. I try to file away in my mind a list of things that he's doing. I think the time has come to write them up! What follows is a snapshot of some of the things going on in sweet, little Andrew's life right now.

- We've been working on potty training quite a bit this last week. We've started him on pull-ups, and he's using the potty several times a day. He is so sweet about the whole endeavor. When we check and find that his pull-ups are wet, he sticks out his bottom lip and often says quietly, "I'm sad." He's got such a sensitive little heart. Just like his mom and his dad:)
- Andrew is also showing some interest in dressing himself. He still prefers for me to change him on the changing table. But in the last few weeks, he's gotten interested in putting on his own shirt and pants. Grace taught him

some good techniques when she was here. The other day during rest time, he had to be rescued once because he somehow got the neck hole of a t-shirt around his waist!

- We recently got Andrew some new yellow rain boots. We got them at the Monona Bootery near our house. We were driving by, and Andrew said, "Mommy, can we stop at the bootery?" I had to say yes:) It's the same store that Mom used to take me for shoes when I was little. Andrew has a blast playing on the same horsey merry-go-round that I played on as a girl.
- Andrew often says, "Let's talk about it." in his adorable, lilting voice. When Bryan or I are at odds with him, that's what we say in order to head off a tantrum or a fit of whining. When something worries Andrew, or if he's thinking back on a serious talk we've had, he'll want to discuss. It's too cute.
- A couple times in the (relatively distant) past, I've brought up Andrew's indiscretions to Bryan at the end of the day. These days, if I chastise Andrew for something, he says in an earnest voice, "We'll have to tell Daddy about this when he gets home."
- Andrew continues to be just incredibly loving toward his sister. He comes to say goodnight to her several times. He snuggles up to her in my bed in the morning and cuddles for quite a while. He often remarks on her beautiful eyes and her sweet face. The other day, he was searching for the right word to describe her. "She's just a ...a ...a yiddle princess," he said. He calls her "Sylvie-ba-dilvie" on a regular basis. Sometimes he lengthens it out to Sylvie-ba-dilvie-ga-dilvie"
- Andrew is pretty into holding hands these days. And telling me (and others too) that I'm (or they are) his "best buddy." He also says, "So.....that was fun!" after doing almost anything he enjoyed.
- I've had to put Andrew under my arm and carry him off kicking and screaming twice in the last week. And both times I was also carrying Sylvia. Both times we were trying to leave a fun place, and both times, he thought he would try to extend his time there by running away from me. I really wanted to impress upon him that running away from me is just completely not acceptable. Poor little guy was so upset. I hate to make him cry. I also really don't like telling him to stop and having him turn and run away faster! Parenting isn't always easy on the heart.
- OK, it's 11:30pm, and it is totally ridiculous that I am on the computer instead of in bed. My sanity tomorrow may be in jeopardy tomorrow due to this post. Good night!

## A bit of fussiness (2008-03-31 07:26)



April 7: I started this post a week ago, but I must have been interrupted by a fussy baby!

Sylvia is a lot like her brother. I don't know what babies are like in general, but the two that I've been lucky enough to raise are pretty similar. And they both have had kind of a rough time around the 5-8 week time period. Looking back at home videos and pictures, I remember that Andrew spent a lot of time crying about this time. I don't think either one is a particular fussy baby. Just normal. And mixed in with some unhappy times are so many sweet smiles (and Sylvia has dimples to boot!). She's getting increasingly aware of the world, and I think she wants to explore it constantly. Just know that if you call between 5/5:30 and whenever she falls asleep (sometimes 8:30, sometimes 10), she may well be crying!

Advice about this time:

Most babies have at least one fussy spell per day. Normal newborn fussiness begins at about one to three weeks of age, peaks at about six to eight weeks, and is gone by about three to four months. That daily spell usually lasts around two to four hours. During this time, your baby may want to breastfeed very frequently. We call this a cluster feeding.

Your baby may also want to be held without being put down and may seem generally unhappy no matter what you do. Don't let it bother you. This normal fussiness isn't a sign that anything is wrong with your milk, the baby or the way you are mothering. A lot of research has been done to learn why babies fuss at times, and theories abound. Yet no one seems to have a clear reason why this occurs. We just know that most babies do it and thrive anyway. It's probably just a normal developmental stage of the infant.

## 4.4 April

### Making forts on a sunny morning (2008-04-02 08:08)



April 2: I'm amazed that I'm having a moment to log on to the computer mid-morning. Sylvia went down for a nap almost an hour ago, and despite waking up and nursing briefly, she's still sleeping. Alivia is spending the morning at our house, and she and Andrew built a cool fort made of blankets and chairs in the sun room. They have flashlights, and pillows, and they have informed me that Spooky (our cat) is a monster from whom they are hiding.

Now they've switched gears and are dancing to the Nutcracker in the living room. They are sure having fun together, despite some, er, negotiation about who is in charge and what it means to share.

I am driving up to Northfield on Thursday night with Sylvia to attend a Carleton Alumni Council meeting on Friday and Saturday. Andrew is going to go to Karen's on Friday. I'm hoping he has fun seeing some of his old friends and spending some time with Karen again.

That's the update for this morning. I'm off to join in the Nutcracker dance!



Pictures from the last few days are in the gallery.

### Sweet moments (2008-04-07 13:31)



April 7: It's a miracle! Both kids are asleep. I just snuck out of the bed after lying down next to Sylvia for almost an hour. She really only likes to nap either on my lap or next to me in bed. Occasionally over the last hour, her eyes would flicker open, and a brief smile would spread across her face as she noted that I was still next to her. What sweetness. But then she seemed more lax, more asleep, and I snuck away to have a few moments in a room by myself before the next round of parenting starts. Andrew is sleeping this afternoon too. After spending the morning at Alivia's house, he came home quiet tired. And happily, today (as opposed to the last couple days) he took a nap. Andrew loves Sylvia so much. I got home from Carleton late on Saturday night. On Sunday morning, Andrew came around to my side of the bed and asked if Sylvia was there. Then he crawled over me, cupped her chubby cheek in his two-year-old hand and said, "She's so beautiful. I love her pretty eyes." Then he got cozy under the covers and cuddled with all of us. What a sweet boy!

Pictures from the last several days are in the gallery.

I drove up to Northfield, MN on Thursday last week to attend an Alumni Council meeting at Carleton. Sylvia had been rather fussy the previous couple days, so I was rather skeptical that it was a good idea to try to drive four hours with her solo and have her sitting in two full-day committee meetings. However, the whole experience was a good one. She didn't cry much on either leg of the trip...maybe an hour, but she tends to cry for around an hour in the evenings anyway, so it was pretty manageable. She did great during the meeting times, and it was a lot of fun to share her with the other people on the council. I love playing "pass the baby!"

While I was gone, Andrew went to daycare at Karen's on Friday and had a great time. I think he enjoyed getting to see

Karen and some of the other kids he knew. On Saturday, Becky came over to watch him in the morning while Bryan went to a Madison Film Festival show, and then Bryan and Andrew spent most of the rest of the day outdoors. It was a lovely weekend. The air was pretty balmy, and we got to see many of our neighbors as we swept out the garage, raked all the leaves out our gardens, and threw balls around in the yard. Today the weather is back in the 30s, but warm spring is peeking around somewhere. I just know it! I have several pots of pansies waiting to be planted when the last piles of snow disappear. We're off to Wichita this weekend to introduce Sylvia to Bryan's grandparents and aunts and uncles. Bryan's parents and Ben and Melanie will be driving up from Texas to join us. We're looking forward to it. This will be Sylvia's first plane flight. And she is eight weeks old today!

### **Mom's birthday (2008-04-07 14:04)**



April 7: Mom's 56th birthday is today. It's the first birthday she's ever skipped in her whole life. And it feels weird. A real reminder that she's not here with us anymore. Instead of feeling sad (which is pretty easy to do), I've been trying to think of using her birthday as an opportunity to celebrate Mom. So family members who are here in Madison are going out to dinner tonight at the Mariner's Inn. I think I'll order lobster. It's Mom's favorite. And mine:)  
I also thought that Mom would probably really enjoy it if I got her grandkids some cute clothes to celebrate her birthday. Unfortunately, shopping with the two little ones is a little beyond my abilities today, so maybe a belated birthday present, Mom.  
I did make a birthday present for Mom. And since she's not here to give it to, I thought I'd share it with you. Mom

really enjoyed poetry. She had lots of poems memorized, and when I went through her papers, I was surprised at the number of poems and beautiful prose that I found copied out in her lovely handwriting. I pulled together a set of poems that either I know Mom enjoyed or I think she would enjoy. You can find them here. I hope they make you smile and perhaps breathe more deeply for a moment and think for a moment about what a wonderful world we all live in.

### Off to Wichita (2008-04-10 19:53)



April 10: We're off to Wichita in the morning! We're really looking forward to seeing Bryan's grandparents as well as his mom and dad and Ben and Melanie (who are all driving up from Texas to meet up with us). We haven't been to Wichita since last April, so they'll see lots of changes in Andrew. And of course, it will be a lot of fun to introduce them to Sylvia! Our bags are packed, and I we're nearly ready to roll.

I'm returning Ben and Melanie's super-cool camera to them, so I downloaded some last photos from it. They're in the gallery (amended to an earlier set of pictures).

We've had a great time seeing lots of our friends in the last week. Andrew and Alivia have been playing together a lot. Eli and Jessica came over the other day. We got to see Sarah and Wyatt last Thursday. Fun times! I also just did a tour of a nearby (as in a block away) preschool, and I registered Andrew to start in the fall. He'll be going two mornings a week from 8:45 to 11:45. The classrooms were so crafty and playful and wonderful. I wish he could start next week! Tootles!

## Adventures in flying (2008-04-14 06:43)

April 14: We just got home from a great weekend in Wichita visiting Bryan's family. The whole weekend was a lot of fun, but our flight home was a little more exciting than I prefer my flights to be. First of all, I can no longer go around thinking that my children don't cry during flights. Andrew has probably flown 20 or 30 times, and he's never made much of a fuss. And the first three legs of our weekend trip, Sylvia was quiet as well. But the flight from Memphis to Madison was different. She was mad from the moment we got on the plane, and although she fell asleep (from utter screaming exhaustion) for a while, she was inconsolable nearly the entire time. She had zero interest in nursing, which Bryan noted makes me a little bit like Superman in the face of kryptonite. So, that was fun.

Then when our plane got to Madison, we started circling instead of landing. After a bit, the pilot got on the intercom and announced that we were maneuvering to Madison's longest runway because the plane's flaps weren't going down. Therefore, the plane was going to be going a lot faster upon landing than usual, and they needed a long runway to give time to stop. Wow. That's exciting.

The emergency row folks got extra briefings, we were told that the landing would be hard and fast, and we should really make sure all our belongings were tightly secured. In order to prevent Sylvia from becoming a projectile, I got out my coat and zipped her up in it. The pilot said he'd done this kind of landing before, and the flight attendant wasn't seeming too phased, and the tenor of the passengers was calm, a little baffled, and probably slightly nervous. It wasn't until we after landed (there was a big thump and a lot of breaks as we stopped) and saw all the fire trucks and ambulances with their lights flashing...waiting for us that I felt worried:)

Many of our fellow passengers took pictures of the plane surrounded by emergency vehicles. Sylvia stopped crying when we got off the plane. I think at this point, my brain has re-congealed after melting from an hour or so of having her cry on my lap:)

OK, off to Sylvia's two-month doctor's appointment!



**Two-month check-up (2008-04-14 12:52)**



April 14: Sylvia just had her two-month appointment this morning. For those who have been waiting for statistics, here's her info:

Height: 23" (95th percentile)

Weight: 11 lbs, 14 oz (75th percentile)

Head circumference: 15" (80th percentile)

Up until now, she's been around the 50th percentile for height and weight. And Andrew was usually between the 25th and 50th percentile. She's growing big!

Our pediatrician was really happy with how she looks. Sylvia even gave her some dimply smiles. That is, before she got her vaccinations. She received three shots this morning, and she's mostly been sleeping since. She woke up just as I finished putting Andrew down for his nap, and she was in a really unhappy mood. I gave her some more Tylenol, nursed her, and laid her back down. Poor baby was acting like she didn't feel well. I'd imagine that three vaccines would make a baby both sore and feeling a little sick too.

## Reconnecting in Wichita (2008-04-15 12:08)



April 15: Our trip to Wichita was really nice! We left early on Friday morning and returned home late on Sunday night. Bryan's parents and Ben and Melanie drove up from Texas to meet us there, and we got to see Bryan's grandparents, his uncles and aunts, and several good family friends. Our pictures of the weekend were plentiful, but they were taken on three cameras. So the gallery currently holds one camera's worth of pictures.

Andrew really enjoyed spending time with everyone. He's petitioning hard for a trip down to Granny and Grandad's house, so I think we'll be looking at a trip down to Texas in June or July. We'll probably even leave him down there to spend a bit of solo time.

Bryan's grandparents are doing well. Grandma and Grandpa Harvey are back in their own home after spending some time in an assisted living suite while Grandpa recovered from hip replacement surgery. Bryan's grandpa, Dandy, passed away last October, so it was nice to see Grandma Jo and give her some hugs. She's doing well and is as full of vim and vigor as ever.

We missed seeing Ben's family and our friends, Julie, Jerry, and Grayson; but maybe next time! Andrew loved playing outdoors. The wind was coming on strong, and it wasn't exactly warm, but that kid has been cooped up inside for so long, he jumps outdoors at the slightest opportunity:) Fortunately, he had lots of loving relatives willing to join him for some running around the yard time.

It was great to introduce everyone to little Sylvia and to let them see what a neat person Andrew is turning into. A great time was had by all!

### **Urge to fuss...fading (2008-04-16 12:49)**

April 16: It's been an intense few days with the kiddos since we returned home from Wichita. However, I have noted that Sylvia seems to be past the worst of the evening fussy times. Makes me think of the Simpson's Treehouse of Horror V quote: "Urge to kill... fading... fading... fading - rising! Fading... fading... gone." Substitute "kill" for "fuss," and I think you've got a good description of where we're heading:)

### **Maretta's wedding is close! (2008-04-20 05:58)**



April 20: Maretta and Kyle's wedding is coming up in only one month and four days! They've been engaged for over two years, so it's kind of hard to believe that the wedding time is nearly upon us. Maretta is graduating with a degree in theater (acting) from the College of St. Catherine's on May 18, moving out of her dorm, and heading down to Madison for a week of preparation. The wedding is on Saturday, May 24, and after that, Maretta and Kyle will be heading back to St. Paul. Kyle is a PhD student at the UM, and he has a few years left in his program. Maretta will look for work and hopefully get some acting roles in the Minneapolis/St. Paul theater scene.

Nearly everything is lined up for the wedding. Maretta, Kyle, Kyle's Mom (Marilyn), and I have teamed up to do the organizing. When Maretta was home over spring break, we got a lot done. With spring on the way, it's feeling more and more like wedding time!



Andrew LOVES "inch worms" (2008-04-20 06:09)



April 20: Andrew spent much of yesterday hunting for worms. He calls earth worms inch worms, despite somewhat lengthy description of why earth worms are called earth worms.

We did a lot of gardening yesterday, and Andrew's role was to find worms. Bryan got out a jar, and Andrew put dozens of worms in it. They marveled and remarked at each worm, often bringing them to me when they were particularly cool. Andrew's face was glowing with excitement and discovery as each new worm was unearthed.

Later, Andrew discovered that some puddles in the street in front of our house contained lots of worms. The problem? They were all dead.

Andrew didn't seem to recognize this. He said that they were "swimming in the ocean." He spent about an hour picking up the worms, holding their grayish, gooey bodies ("They are long and thin, Mommy!"), and moving them from the "ocean" to the pavement. "Touch them, Mommy!" I have a pretty big tolerance for dirt and decay and the general grossness of biology, but I admit to having a bit of a gag reflex when Andrew tried to set one of his very slimy, very dead worms on my knee.

this morning, Andrew woke up and nearly immediately started clamoring to go outside to see the worms:)

**She's such a sweetheart (2008-04-20 06:27)**



April 20: When Andrew crawls in bed with us in the morning, he first wants to snuggle with Sylvia. Often, the first spoken words of the morning are, "Can I hold Sylvie? She's such a thweetheart!"

Sylvia is so smiley and beautifully engaging these days. Her neck is getting very strong, and she can see across the room clearly. Yesterday while we were gardening, I put her out on her play mat in the yard. She seemed to enjoy it...one of the first times it's been warm enough for her to enjoy some outdoor relaxation.

In the past couple days, we took two stroller rides with both kids. Sylvia really prefers to be held, but she did well during the 1/2 hour walks to and from Olbrich. It's neat to have my two kids in the bike trailer/stroller now!

Sylvie can be pretty fussy still. Yesterday she wouldn't sleep from about 1pm until we both fell asleep at 8pm. She spent much of the afternoon being a not-so-very-happy camper. In the evening, I was trying to lie down with her to help her sleep, but it meant that we both slept together:)

Check out Andrew's nine-week baby pictures in the gallery. They look so much alike! More pictures of our week are in the gallery as well.

## Fun day in Chicago (2008-04-20 06:48)



April 20: On Thursday, Sylvia and I joined my Gathering Waters friends for a fun day in Chicago. Everyone (but Vicki) drove down to Chicago for a fun day of eating and shopping and museum-going. A perk for both current and recent employees. I was so happy to be included; I just love my co-workers. They are some of my favorite people.

Pam and I drove down together with both babies. Mercy is a week younger than Sylvia. All day, the girls were champs. They hardly had any problems, and they fit right in. Meanwhile, Andrew spent the day at Karen's having fun playing with all his old favorite toys. Pictures of our gang are in the gallery.

We shopped at Nordstrom's. The shoe department was...amazing. Karen wrote a great description of the shoe experience in her blog. We ate lunch at a great restaurant by chef Rick Bayless called Frontera. Oh, boy, it was goood.

Then we went to the Shedd Aquarium for much of the afternoon. When the aquarium closed, it was rush hour, so we decided to shop and eat instead of returning home. We explored Crate and Barrel and then had a yummy dinner at the Grand Luxe Cafe, where everything, especially the portions were grande.

Pam and I didn't get home until almost midnight, but we had a wonderful day. I feel so lucky to have such great friends. They make me laugh and feel oh-so good about life.

**Baby Lerner should be arriving shortly (2008-04-20 07:13)**



April 20: I'm really excited for Heather and Michael. Their baby girl should be born this week. Little baby girl Lerner is going to be induced on Tuesday, April 22 (Earth Day:) Statistics show that risks to the baby increase as they go past 38 weeks gestation, so they will be inducing at 38 weeks. Heather's blog is [lernerclan.net](http://lernerclan.net), so you can check that for pictures and updates.

Heather and Michael have been through so much after losing baby Allan at 41 weeks in September 2006. I'm sure these final days of waiting are going to be quite challenging, and they could probably use any loving thoughts you have to send their way.

Little baby girl, we can't wait to see you!!

**Slow torture (2008-04-22 13:08)**



April 22: I hate to do anything that sounds too much like complaining, but Andrew currently has at his disposal a set of behaviors that act upon my brain like the tactics of a malicious, medieval torturer. He seems to assess my condition, and say to himself:

- "I think that the rack (a.k.a. whining) would work pretty well on her right now at melting her brain. I've been honing my pitch undulation and body flopping techniques, and I think I've hit upon a combo that really does her in."
- "Hmmm...I know we were just having a great time, but what if I was to run away screaming and hide right now instead of going nicely like we prepped all the way here. That might result in some interesting expressions on her face!"
- "I've come up with 14 ways to avoid putting on my pants to go outside. I bet I can come up with another 6 to make it an even 20. Now that Sylvia is crying, this is starting to get pretty interesting. I wonder if we'll still end up going or if I'll leave the house a naked screaming flopping mess under her arm. Worth finding out how far I can push the situation until one of us pops!"

He mixes up the hard times with behaviors so angelic, so beatific and sweet that it makes it seem like heaven's light is shining in our presence. When he makes up stories or chases after bubbles or makes innocent and poignant comments about the weather or his feelings or his love for his sister, well, I can't imagine anything more lovely. Sometimes I think it's a really good thing that he's cute.

### **Sylvia laughs (2008-04-22 13:24)**

I'm having a hard time embedding the video, so here's a link to a clip where Sylvia laughs.

### **Heather's in and out of labor (2008-04-22 16:04)**

April 22: I've been following Heather and Michael's blog throughout the day. She was admitted to the hospital last night for her scheduled induction. As of mid-day today, it sounded like labor was progressing. However, this afternoon, what I'm hearing is that the things aren't moving forward, so the doctors are planning on continuing with the drug-induced labor until 8pm tonight and at that point shut off the drugs to give Heather a chance to eat and sleep. Then they'll start up again in the morning.

The medical professionals are all really happy with how both Heather and the baby are doing. And just so you know, whatever happened to Allan occurred before labor even started, so there isn't any increased concerns about how this baby does through labor and delivery. We just really want to get her out and hold her!



Gett'n by with a little help from my friends (2008-04-23 11:41)



April 23: We're having a glorious day today. It's about 1:30, and already we've had a full day's worth of activities. We took the van in to get serviced, dropped Bryan off at work, went to the bakery so Andrew and I could enjoy cupcakes together, stopped in at the library and got some books, met friends at the zoo, and had a beautiful picnic lunch with same friends as boys romped about in the green green grass.

And at the moment (and when I say moment, I mean this one minute time period), both children are either asleep or at least resting quietly. Ahhh.

As I was trying to get Andrew in his car seat after our picnic, he wouldn't go and Sylvia was screaming in my arms, making it difficult to just hoist the little guy into his seat. But a woman in the next car over noticed my predicament and offered her help. So she put Andrew in his seat (and he was so surprised he didn't protest at all) while I buckled in Sylvia. And yesterday it was pouring rain and one of the volunteers at Olbrich offered to watch the kids while I drove the car around to the front so I wasn't trying to get them both in the car in the rain. My initial response to such offers is, "No, that's alright, I've got it." But these past days, it's felt really liberating to sort of acknowledge that sometimes the two kids is a bit bigger of a job than one adult with only two hands can manage. I've been feeling pretty good about accepting help from strangers. Makes life feel more manageable!

Pictures from the last several days are in the gallery.



**Baby Lerner should be arriving today (2008-04-23 11:46)**

April 23: 1:45pm - No recent news from Heather and Michael, but early this morning, Michael's blog post said that they were re-ramping up the pitocin and breaking the water with the idea of getting the baby out today. Heather called me last night after they'd stopped inducing for the evening. She sounded really good - a bit tired and pretty hungry, and she was alright that they were taking a slow approach to induction. The baby's vitals were all looking good.

It's strange to be calmly enjoying a beautiful day knowing that such a dear friend is in the midst of birthing her child! Especially after having so recently delivered Sylvia. Big times!

**Evelyn Rose Lerner is here! (2008-04-23 17:36)**



April 25 update - Her name is Evelyn Rose Lerner

April 23: I just got off the phone with Heather, and she is happily holding her sweet baby girl. The little one arrived at 3:33 this afternoon. She weighs 7lbs, 6oz and is 19.25 inches long. Heather said she has dark, wavy hair. She has super-long finger nails, a perfect little rose of a mouth, a little half-moon chin, and chubby thighs.

I'm hoping for pictures on their website ([lernerclan.net](http://lernerclan.net)) soon. Heather was doing well and sounded great. I'm sure

it's been a big several days!  
Welcome new little one. You are much loved.  
Some early pictures are in the gallery.

### **Spa-like experience (2008-04-25 12:23)**

April 25: I meant to write this post about a month back, but I never got around to it. It was one of my first mornings home alone with both kids, and I decided to try to take a shower. Andrew usually played in the bathroom while I showered, but he had recently learned how to open door knobs, so could take off and play elsewhere. Sylvia was in her bouncy seat next to the shower so I could peek out and look at her. So I hop in the shower, and almost immediately, I hear the door open-Andrew has left the room. Oh well...hopefully he won't destroy himself or anything else. Then Sylvia starts screaming. "OK," I think, "I just need to be quick here." Then the steam from the bathroom floats out into the hall and sets the fire alarm off. Great. "This is relaxing and restorative!" I think over the screaming baby and the fire alarm. Then Andrew comes in and announces (over the din) than he took off his diaper and had an accident. I decide at that point to stop hurrying and just stay in the shower as long as possible. Fun times!

### **Sylvia has met all her great-grandparents (2008-04-25 12:28)**

April 25: Andrew, Sylvia, and I drove down to Janesville today and got to visit with my mom's mom (Mum) for the first time since Sylvia was born. Mum thought the little girl was just wonderful, and Andrew did an admirable job amusing himself in Mum's rooms during our visit. I had picked up some hamburgers from Culvers, so we all ate those and some of Mum's yogurt, admired the baby, and went through some small items from Mum's house (which has now sold). Sylvia (who does NOT like her car seat) screamed for about half of each of the drives, but overall she did really well. It's a spring-y day, and our maple tree has just burst out full of the springiest green flowers. The tulilps that we planted last fall are all coming up, and the magnolia tree I got for Sylvia is starting to bloom even though we haven't planted it in the ground yet! Beautiful spring is here.

## My mom's shopping finds (2008-04-25 13:19)



April 25: In the last couple weeks, I've gone down to the basement and sorted through all Andrew's old clothes to see what Sylvia can use and which things can get passed along to friends. I had mixed feels about the whole experience. I loved Andrew's baby clothes, and it was wonderful to look through them all again. But so many of them were either from my mom or I had purchased while with my mom. And it made me really heart-sick to remember how much fun we had baby clothes shopping.

Now that it's spring, I also just pulled out some clothes I had bought at the end of the season last year. In the box were the last of the items that Mom and I had bought for Andrew together. I still can't believe she's not here.

It is really hard to hold some cute outfit that we had discovered and loved over together and know that there won't be any future clothes shopping trips with her. I can remember the store, the rack, the other things that we bought that day. Shopping was something we always had fun doing together. And that's really an understatement.

I feel so sad that my mom wasn't able to have fun looking for clothes for her beautiful granddaughter. And I feel really guilty for being the only one of my siblings to get to share a grandchild with her and to benefit from her parenting advice and expertise.

It really all just sucks.

Especially when I see the spring line of cute little boy shortalls that Mom admired last year and to be re-reminded with that hollow feeling in my gut that she's not here to see them this spring. So I guess I'll just admire them for her.

"Singing" (2008-04-26 11:24)



April 26: Sylvia spends a lot of the time she's in her car seat...screaming. I feel like I need a different word for that because screaming is such a violent, negative word and she does it so much that I want to re-name it something more positive. So today as I again drove across town accompanied by her gasping, gurgling on saliva, full-throttle screaming, I decided that I will refer to such behavior as "singing." And as long as she was singing, I might as well sing too.

Usually I spend the first 5-10 minutes of a drive trying to soothe her by singing, shushing, stroking her face, trying to get her to take the pacifier, and then I give up and sit in resigned silence for the remainder of the drive. But this time I put on a new kids CD I got at the library called Ralph's World and sang Happy Lemonade about 10 times in a row.

The lyrics are as follows:

Happy lemons for happy days  
Happy people with smiling faces  
Happiness is a glass of lemonade

Lemonade, in the shade  
Everyone loves lemonade

Happy lemons for happy days

Happy people with smiling faces  
Happiness is a glass of lemonade

La la la la la la la la  
La la la la la la la la  
La la la la la la la lemonade

So Sylvia and I "sang" a duet on our drive across town: me belting out "happy lemons for happy days, happy people with smiling faces.." and Sylvia "singing" wahhhh waaaaahhhh...gasp, gasp...silent scream...very audible scream...gurgle-cough from saliva that collected in the back of the throat during the last extended scream. cough cough cough. ANGRY cry from the coughing. wahhhh waaahhhh waaaaahhhhhh. And meanwhile I'm at "la la la la la la la..."

I may be scarring the poor girl by singing about happiness being a glass of lemonade while she's in the throws of deepest carseat misery, but at least I'll be heading toward a nice Willy Wonka-esque insanity:)

PS. Joe did a nice post about Sylvia's carseat crying back in March.

### **Sylvia's birth story (2008-04-27 16:39)**

April 27: Heather just did a nice post on her website ([lernerclan.net](http://lernerclan.net)) about Evie's birth story. Reading it spurred me to write down Sylvie's birth story. I've been meaning to write it down for a couple months, and I better do it soon or I'll forget some of the fun details! I'm writing this for Sylvia to have in the future, but in the meantime, if you like this sort of thing, here's our story.

Sylvia's due date was calculated as February 8. Andrew was born five days before his due day, so I was all ready for the little one to be born for about a week before. It was a snowy, snowy week. In fact, a couple days before I went into labor, we had a truly tremendous snowstorm. Glad we weren't trying to get to the hospital through that! By February 10, the roads were snow free (but our street was covered in a very thick layer of ice). Since we couldn't get outside and since I was at a bit of a loss as to what to do with my humungous self, Bryan and I decided to go walk around Target and West Towne Mall to see if that would get my systems in labor mode. While LuAnn watched Andrew, Bryan and I enjoyed one last pre-baby outing together. We went to Target where I was delighted to find a couple final sets of the birth announcements that I'd been looking for for weeks. Then we headed over to the mall and walked up and down. At one point, I stopped by The Children's Place and picked up a pair of teeny white fleece pants. There were displays of Valentine's Day clothes, but I didn't bother looking at them since I figured I could still be pregnant when Valentines Day came around.

When we got home around 4pm, I sat down to address baby announcements and make some thank you cards. It was about that time that I started having contractions. Bryan joked that my body had just been waiting for me to have everything in order before kicking in labor. Once all baby announcements were acquired, it was go time:)

I sat on the sofa and exerted some creative energy while I started experiencing contractions that pretty quickly became regular and about 5 minutes apart. LuAnn made pasta fagioli for supper. I really enjoyed it but ate rather sparingly, figuring that if labor progressed that night I might not want to have a full tummy of food! During early contractions, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. They lasted about 20 seconds. From 5-6 pm, contractions got

stronger where I couldn't listen to others talk during contractions. Between contractions, however, I felt perfectly fine. Andrew came over to talk to me after dinner, and it was pretty weird to try talking to a two-year-old while in labor!

After dinner, Bryan and I headed back to our bedroom while LuAnn put Andrew down to bed. I was interested in hypnobirthing, so Bryan helped to make a calm, quiet environment for laboring. We put on some soft classical music, turned off most of the lights, and propped me up on pillows. Andrew came in to say goodnight. Contractions were increasingly intense and were coming every 3-5 minutes. After a while, we moved over to the tub where I labored for a while. It was in the tub where I had some contractions that I thought I could have named as they do with hurricanes.

### Waiting (2008-04-28 10:54)



April 28: Alivia and Andrew are currently lying on the mattress we have temporarily stored in the sun room. They are all wrapped up in the mattress pad. Each has a baby doll. And for the last ten minutes (which is a long time for little kids), they have been staring at the clock, whispering and waiting for it to be 1:00. It's currently 12:54. I'm impressed.

PS. They did wait until 1pm. Then they put on a dolphin show...leaping and cavorting around like dolphins. The dolls were baby dolphins. SO cute!

Pictures of these two clowns are in the gallery.



**New bedrooms! (2008-04-28 13:37)**



April 28: We were productive over the weekend! While Bryan mulched and dug weeds and planted Sylvia's new magnolia tree, I played musical rooms with our bedrooms. Sylvia sleeps in bed with us, and her dresser has been in the guest room. We change her diaper and clothes either in our bedroom or in Andrew's room or in our room. I've been planning to move Andrew to the guest bedroom and make Andrew's room back into a nursery for Sylvie. So in the last couple weeks, I acquired some safari-print sheets for Andrew's bed, a cool new clock for his wall, and a zebra rug for the floor. Then on Saturday, I moved Sylvia's stuff from the guest room to our room. I moved the queen bed out to the sunroom, and transferred Andrew's bed to his new room. I swapped the dressers in the two rooms, and I pulled the puff rocker from the sunroom into Andrew's room. Bryan helped me pull the crib up from the basement, and we got that all set up in Sylvia's room. Then I had fun hanging pictures on the walls and organizing book shelves. I got to hang the beautiful silk canopy above Sylvia's crib (don't worry, I'll take it down when she gets old enough to grab it) and put pretty touches around the room for her. Andrew leapt wildly about his new room, rolling around on his rug and cheering. So I don't think I have to be worried about him liking it. Pictures of the new rooms (and of other cute kid antics) are in the gallery.

We also got the kid a new mattress for his bed. The bed frame is one that I used, and we got the mattress quite used back in the '80s, so his new sheets are covering a much firmer, cushier bed.

Sylvia's room has two sound machines...one I bought specially for her and the Sleep Sheep that my mom had

used for a long time. It seems like having both of them going simultaneously helps my very sound-sensitive daughter find her way to dreamland. We put her down in her crib last night, and she slept there until around 1am. It was the first time we've slept in separate rooms ever. I flipped between feeling luxuriant and missing her dreadfully. Bryan brought her into bed when she woke, so in the morning, I had my little one snuggled up against me. What a sweetheart (as Andrew says!).

Now each kid has his/her own space, and it feels really nice and settled. Wow. We have a full house!

PS. Any ideas about how to move a queen sized bed across town? I'm going to take it over to Michael's house, but I'm not sure how to do it other than renting a truck!

### **Morning activities (2008-04-29 13:24)**

April 29: Andrew is counting to 20 in his room instead of napping. Sylvia is sleeping with intermediate wake-ups. She's very mad when she wakes up, but then pop in the paci, and back to dreamland she goes. Andrew has been wearing big-boy undies for the last several weeks, but he came out of his room a bit ago with a "poopy diaper" a.k.a. poopy underpants. While I was washing out his undies, he sat on the toilet and dropped his dad's dice into the water. (Bryan, if you're reading this, sorry! I pulled them out and washed them off with soap.) Trying not to lose my cool, I got the little guy re-clothed and back into his room for continued quiet time. Which since it is not particularly quiet nor restful for Andrew I may re-name "Mommy-needs-a-break-time."

Michael came over this morning. He's back from visiting Joe in Maine with Terry and hasn't yet started the job hunt. I rented a van, and we moved our queen-sized guest bed to his house. Then he brought over Rocky's pizza for lunch. Michael stayed home with the kids while I picked up and dropped off the truck. It was one of the first times I've left Sylvie. They did fine:)

Before he left, Michael helped me set up an art easel that Granny and Grandad got Andrew last Christmas. I'd been waiting until we moved the rooms around to pull it up. When Andrew gets up from his "mommy needs a break" time, he'll have a fun surprise!

Thanks Uncle Bubba, for all your help today!

### **My favorite blogs (2008-04-29 13:59)**

April 29: I really enjoy following a variety of blogs, and it occurred to me that some of my readers might like to hear about a nifty tool that allows you to check on the status of your favorite blogs without having to visit each one. "Wouldn't it be cool," you might think, "if there was one website I could go to and see if there was anything new to read on my email, favorite blogs, favorite news sources, etc.?" The good news is that there is just such a tool and the even better news is that it's ultra easy to use and the one I use is very pretty to look at.

iGoogle allows you to create a your own customizable homepage (it takes about 30 seconds to set up).

You can have all sorts of content on the home page. Mine for example (see the image below) shows new emails I've received and the top three stories of all the websites I regularly view. So I can see at a glance if any of my siblings or Julie or Karen have written a new post. I also have a spot where I can see if I've had any new comments on my website (because I just love reading my comments!). To add new content to my Google homepage, I can either click

on the RSS icon in my web browser's address bar (it's the orange and white icon) on the right-hand side or type in the URL of the blog.

While I'm sharing info about cool things you can do with this tool, I should mention that Google news alerts allows you to create custom queries for news. So I can set up a Google news search for "Dotzour" to see where Bryan's dad was last quoted. Or I can create a search for articles about land conservation that are printed in Wisconsin. The results of these searches can be shown on my Google homepage as well. Very handy! And potentially makes me feel much more on top of things than I really am! Just remember that whenever you see the RSS feed icon in the address bar that you can add it to your Google homepage (or other RSS feed aggregator).

I'll also just say that I love Google's calendar...it's what I use to keep myself organized...and Google Documents which allows you to create and share Word, Excel, and PowerPoint-type documents. The best part is that you can access them from anywhere - a real help when I was working on things from home, work, and the coffee shop!

OK, I've been meaning to write a post about the joys of my Google homepage for quite some time. It's too fun a tool not to share! Plus, you can make it pretty with all kinds of fun themes. I love that kind of thing!

Enjoy!

## 4.5 May

### **Who's awake now? (2008-05-02 01:50)**

May 2, 3:45 am: Sylvia is spending her first night in her crib tonight. It's (I believe) the first time since she was born that I've gotten out of bed at night. That's one of my favorite bits about having her sleep right next to me. I barely have to come-to at night to feed her. But the last week or so, my right hand has been numb every morning, so I figured that my body had had enough of sleeping funny (my arm off to the side over her head) and she should try out her new room.

I've gotten out of bed a couple times to nurse, and she went right back to sleep this last time. But I didn't. For the first time since she was born, I tossed and turned and couldn't sleep. And my hand is still numb even without her in bed! So I decided to get up to hang out on the computer for a bit and listen to the thunder storm before heading back to bed. Bon Soir!

**Walking amidst the wildflowers (2008-05-04 18:01)**



May 4: What a lovely weekend! On Friday, Sylvia and I drove out to Jack's house to attend his annual wildflower weekend. Sylvia "sang" well over half of the two-hour drive both there and back. Urgh. But for the rest of the weekend, she was just delightful to be around. Jack's house is on the Wisconsin River; I think it's just about my favorite place in the world. Around 20 people attended the weekend this year...mostly friends of Jack's whom I've known since I was small. Sylvia was a big hit with everyone, and she really enjoyed meeting Jack for the first time. Photos from our spring weekend are in the gallery.

On Saturday, we took a nice long hike across Jack's land, down through Bergum Bottoms, up a big, big hill, across a lovely, windy meadow, and back down. Aside from chasing Andrew around, I haven't been particularly active over the last five months, but the 11 mile hike was good. Sylvia was in my front carrier, and she dozed most of the day. We all stopped for a few breaks while I nursed her, and she made sure to keep the party going by getting fussy and demanding that we (or at least I) resume walking promptly after her meal was over. It felt great to be introducing her to so much fresh air and such a lovely place at the tender age of two months:) And I enjoyed the challenge of scrambling over trees and clambering up and down muddy hills with a wee one. A little challenge is a good thing:)

We had lots of yummy meals, good music, and great company. Most everyone else camped, which was pretty much winter camping since the temperature got down to below freezing last night! I figured that it was a bit too early for Sylvia to camp in freezing weather, so we were sung in the house.

There were lots of fantastic birds to be seen at the feeders in front of the house. At one point, two indigo buntings and two goldfinches perched on a tube feeder. Someone mentioned that it looked like the Michigan flag! There were oriole sightings, rose breasted grosbeaks, and lots of other sweet little birdies to watch.

I hadn't been on the wildflower walk since 2005 - when I was pregnant with Andrew - and it was great to get to see everyone and hike the trails again. I'm already looking forward to our annual family summer trip in August!

### **New opportunities for art (2008-05-04 19:24)**

May 4: April 30 was Bryan's mom's birthday, and to celebrate, we decided to pull up the art easel that they had gotten Andrew for Christmas. Andrew saw the box at Christmas time, but he'd forgotten all about it, so a few days ago, Michael put it together for him. Andrew has really been enjoying having open access to drawing supplies. The video below and some photos in the gallery show him having a fun time.

**Thinking of Mom (2008-05-04 20:42)**



May 4: While I was at Jack's for the wildflower weekend, Sylvia and I stayed in the guest bedroom. It felt nice but kind of heavy to be sleeping in one of the rooms that Mom had so meticulously decorated. She spent many years helping Jack decorate his home, and almost every detail was shaped by her sense of style. Between seeing her imprint on the walls around me, thinking back on all the wonderful family vacations we took together at Jack's, and being close to the beautiful Wisconsin River, my mind filtered through thoughts of Mom all weekend. I think that if after she died, her spirit dissipated into a million million pieces that many of them might have found their way to the Lower Wisconsin River. I can imagine her energy flitting over the water like the swallows or living on in the powerful down strokes of a bald eagle as it launches into the sky.

Bergum Bottoms was always one of Mom's favorite places, and walking down the beautiful road - eating lunch next to the River with the little girl she never met on my lap - made me want to appreciate it for her.

I wouldn't necessarily say that I now appreciate life more since losing Mom, but I would say that I've become innately aware of the impermanence of life. That feeling you get on New Year's Eve singing Auld Lang Syne has stuck with me. I often find myself looking around at the place I am occupying, the people I am with, the feeling I have in my heart because of their company, and I hold onto it a little more because I know it's a moment in time and that



we really can't count on having things repeat again and again just as we would wish. I don't think go around thinking that bad things will or might happen, I just try to make things count a bit more, pay a little more attention, and love a little harder.

Back in September, Joe wrote a post on his blog that has really stuck with me:

Given any moment, I have a set of conditions under which my brain operates. I assume that there is something beneath my feet, holding me up. I assume that there will continue to be oxygen in the air for me to breathe after this breath. I assume the Earth isn't going to spontaneously combust. I assume that I have a father, a mother, two sisters, and a brother. When I take time to stop and think about these conditions under which I am continually operating, I realize that they aren't all true. I rediscover the flaw in the code of my brain and it feels like an entirely new wound.

For me, the conditions under which I operate feel a little less certain than they did years ago.

I assume that the next time I see you, dear reader, we will have as nice a time together as we did last time. But you never know. So I've been responding to the unknowable-ness of our future by hanging on to the relationships that I treasure just a bit more tightly.

Sometimes I think it's nice to get out of my normal routine for even a couple days. It seems to allow my brain to do some meandering along less traveled paths.

### **Poem recitation (2008-05-11 13:40)**

Yesterday at breakfast, Andrew shocked me by reciting one of Shel Silverstein's poems from start to finish. Then he did it again so I could video it...a small miracle! This is one cute kid:)

Joey Joey took a stone  
And knocked  
Down  
The  
Sun!  
And Whoosh! It swizzled  
Down so hard.  
And bloomp! It bounced  
In his backyard.  
And glunk! It landed  
On his toe!  
And the world was dark,  
And the corn wouldn't grow!  
And the wind wouldn't blow!  
And the cock wouldn't crow!  
And it always was Night,

Night,  
Night.

All because  
Of a stone  
And Joe.

Shel Silverstein

**Happy Mother's Day! (2008-05-11 13:46)**



May 11: I just wanted to send a quick hello to all my mom friends out there. Dad came over for lunch, and we toasted all the mothers who got us to where we are today. Andrew and I made a yummy berry coffee cake for breakfast this morning, and I think we're going to head over to Olbrich this afternoon. I just uploaded a week's worth of pictures (boy, are those kids cute!). They can be found in the gallery.

## First Mother's Day without my mom (2008-05-11 20:50)



May 11: Days like today really make me address some of the sadness that I carry around now that Mom is gone. It's almost like I've found ways to store some of the hurts - nicely folded and put in printed hat boxes on a shelf in my heart. Then a day like Mother's Day comes along, and I need to open the boxes up and shake open the contents. I felt really sad this morning that Mom couldn't see her grandkids. It's a hurt I don't think about all the time, but today it just felt newly sad and unfair and so so hard that my mom of all people doesn't get to enjoy her grandchildren. She would so love Andrew. And she's stroke Sylvie's soft, firm cheeks, and her heart would be so happy. So I'd just like to put out there again for the record that this all is just very unfair and not fun at all.

Growing up, Mom had us believe that Mother's Day was about grandmothers. When we were young, I don't think we did much for our mom on Mother's Day. It was all a part of Mom not asking for acknowledgment for herself. So I feel like she really, really deserved to get some payback for all her hard work in the upcoming years as she watched her kids flourish.

I think the things that make me the most sad about Mom not being her are

- having her miss out on my kids - and on other potential grandkids in the future
- having her miss Mareta's wedding and watching her and Kyle start their life together
- her not getting to finish raising Joe and (to a slightly lesser extent) Mareta

Yup. Those are the points that are really hard for me to accept. There are all sorts of reasons why I miss her and why

I want her back for me, but those are the reasons that I want her back for her.

Bryan and I took the kids out to the cemetery today. It was my first visit there since the burial. Dad had been by earlier with some daisies. On the way there, I told Andrew where we were going.

Me: "We're going to the cemetery where we buried Grandma in the ground after she died. It's a pretty place, and we wanted to go there to tell her we love her."

Andrew: pause

Me: "How does that make you feel?"

Andrew: "A yiddle bit sad... They buried grandma in the ground?? I miss my mommy."

So we talked about it a little more...I mention that I miss my mom enough that I really think Andrew has a pretty good handle on what is going on. And we went to the Windsor cemetery and stood near the bare earth on her grave site. It is a nice place. Mom talked about it in terms of being planted. She's planted in a nice place. And we're going to plant some trees for her. I think a scarlet oak and a non-fruiting flowering crab apple.

Happy Mother's Day, Mom. We wish you were here.

### **Kitties turn eight (2008-05-11 21:19)**



May 11: As a general notice, our cats turn eight years-old this month. I decided long ago that their birthday would be May 10. So we sang to them. And gave them some kibble. Happy birthday Bowser and Spooky! May you enjoy many more years of sleeping in the sunlight, curling up on us on chilly winter nights, and kneading my head until you draw blood (Bowser). You are now middle aged, rotundish felines. And we love you. You can see early pictures of the kitties on our old website [here](#).

**A handy girl - She's 3 months old! (2008-05-11 21:40)**



May 11: Today was Sylvia's three-month birthday. Happy Birthday sweet girl! It's hard to believe how strong and capable she is getting. In fact, tonight at dinner, she reached for a toy and pulled it off the table. In the last week, she's been working hard to get her hands and her brain to work in sync. She's getting better and better at moving her hands toward an object of interest...but it's still pretty rudimentary. What an amazing thing to watch her little body develop! Once she figures out how to control her hands, watch out world!

She's also seeming like she's getting the hang of this life thing a lot more. She can anticipate things: for example, walking into her room sometimes results in her crying because she thinks we might be trying to lay her down in her crib (she's probably right). Also, saying something soothing while walking into the room where she is crying in her crib can quiet her because she's getting where she can anticipate that she may get picked up soon.

She doesn't mind being dressed and undressed nearly as much as she did a couple months ago. And she's now strong enough to stand in her little saucer for quite some time. What an amazing baby! She's been hard at work, learning how to operate in this big world.

The other night, she slept for six hours. A miracle. She normally wakes up after about three hours, and Bryan apparently went in at that point and soothed her and she slept for another three hours. That means I slept for six hours straight. Oh heaven.

She's laughing more and more, and her dimples are so cute I constantly want to eat them. She hates her car seat as if it is a torture device, and she also thinks strollers are evil. Being held is just the way to go:) Thank heavens for slings and carriers!

She loves looking up at mobiles, and she loves kicking at chimes. When you blow on her face, she smiles. Ev-

ery time I change her diaper, I kiss both her knees and her tummy and tell her they are kisses from her grandma. She blows lots of drooly bubbles from her sweet tiny lips. And she still gets the hiccups pretty regularly. She doesn't seem to mind them.

Her face lights up when her big brother walks up to her, and she's already a pretty tough cookie to be able to withstand his loving ministrations. What an amazing three-month-old! I want to slow her down and speed her up all at the same time. I feel very, very lucky to be her mama.

### **Silence - OK, crying (2008-05-15 12:23)**

May 15: I sat down to write that there was finally a still over the house. The echos of crying are flowing out the windows. But then I hear a familiar, "Wah, waaaaah, hic hic hic hic whaaaa whaaaa..."

Sylvia has been crying since about 10 am. It's now 2:21pm. That's a long time. And she's pretty inconsolable. Doesn't matter if I hold her or bounce her or stand near white noise. She won't nurse. She arches her back and wails. So around 1pm I gave her Tylenol. And about 20 minutes later she fell asleep. For 10 minutes at which point Andrew was yelling and woke her up.

I just gave her a massage, and she stopped crying while I was rubbing her. Then I covered her up and left, but she's crying again. So I'll try continuous massage to see if that keeps her happy. It would make me happy.

I have an appointment to get my hair cut and highlighted in two hours and thirty-seven minutes. It'll be my first time away from the little girl. Keep Bryan in your thoughts. Something tells me that it won't be an easy time.

OK, off to rescue her from herself. Poor sweet pea. I hope she's not getting sick.

### **Serious lack of chocolate (2008-05-15 13:05)**

May 15 (3pm): Sylvie has been asleep for about 20 minutes. And my core is re-centering. I do have one major problem, however. I need chocolate. Really, a lot, I do. I should have an emergency stash set up for just such occasions of half-day baby crying jags. On the other hand, I probably would have obsessively eaten it all before noon today. That's actually why I do not have any chocolate on hand. My bags of chocolate chips were disappearing way too fast, so I decided I couldn't be trusted with them any more.

I wish I had a root cellar or a trap door like you'd find in a 100-year-old house in New England. I would have a fireproof box full of dark, imported chocolate. I'd tiptoe down the the basement, move burlap sacks and shove aside an old trunk to open the trap door, and then, viola. Chocolate heaven.

OK that's it. I'm making brownies.



**Bryan's first solo eveing a success (2008-05-16 06:16)**



May 16: When I drove up to the house at 7:45 last night, I expected to hear wailing as I walked in the house. Instead, there was a happy dad and boy and a sleeping girl. Bryan said that Sylvie took the bottle I left...guzzled it's small contents and really wanted more. But other than a little unhappiness, she rested in the Baby Bjorn and then went to sleep.

And I had a lovely time getting my hair done. Having not been away from Sylvie for more than about 20 minutes has been just fine, but it felt so luxuriant and free to sit in a salon with my hair all foiled, reading a magazine and overhearing salon chatter.

Then after we put the kids to bed, Bryan and I sat and chatted for an hour or so. And unfortunately rare occurrence these days.

Andrew has just curled up next to me and said, "Hi Mommy Fox, I'm your yiddle cub all curled up in our cozy den together." So cute! "Will you play with me, Mommy Fox?" I'm off to tickle my cub!

May days (2008-05-19 12:48)



May 19: We're back from a full weekend in St. Paul. Andrew is in his room, and Sylvia is sleeping (on and off), and I'm crashed on the chair amidst a very messy living room. I have no thoughts for supper. I can't imagine (at the moment) having the energy to clean up the kitchen from lunch. What I'd really like to do is nap, but I just can't ever seem to nap, so instead I'll hang out on the computer and hope that Sylvia keeps sleeping (there she's crying) and Andrew remains happy in his room for another hour.

Bryan's parents are on vacation in Israel right now. They are on a tour with Chuck Swindoll. The itinerary says that they are currently in Jerusalem. I've also discovered a video blog of their tour, which is neat to see. I imagine they are having an amazing experience!

Maretta's wedding is in five days. SO Exciting! If I weren't so tired at the moment, I'd call her to see if she wanted to come over to plan out details with me, but perhaps we'll work on those kinds of things tonight. It's going to be a lovely event.

Pictures from the last week are in the gallery.

Last week, we we went to Olbrich, where I took some cute pictures of the kiddos in the gardens. Friday was Terry's 60th birthday, and Saturday was Bryan's 30th birthday. On Friday evening, Michael, Tom, Terry, and the four of us met at Tenney Park for a picnic of shrimp po'boy sandwiches and gingerbread for dessert. Andrew enjoyed playing in the playground, and we all walked down to Lake Mondota to watch the sun set. It was a nice evening.

Andrew's been getting injured quite a bit these last days. He has a mild laceration on his foot (stepping on the edge of a piece of sheet metal), a huge yellow and brown bruise on the side of his neck (tripping on my foot and flying into a metal bench head first), and a cut and bruise on his forehead (climbing around in the car and falling on the corner of a wooden mirror frame). I really do try to be a good mother:) This past weekend he had a blast climbing around some low trees, and I was impressed at his recent levels of climbing prowess. He's a neat kid!

Sylvie is up now, and she is sitting on my lap goo-ing, ahhhh-ing, and playing with her hands. She recently has discovered her hands, and let me tell you, they are cool. You can hold one with the other, you can try to shove both in your mouth at the same time, and then there's the fingers! It's all very amazing for a little girl.

On the drive home from St. Paul, I read several chapters of Laura Ingalls Wilder's book *Farmer Boy* to Andrew. He seemed to enjoy it, and it's pretty cool to think that he may be old enough to start listening to chapter books. I'm excited about the possibilities!

Spring is fully here. The lilacs have started blooming, the daffodils are all done, the tulips are past their prime. It's time to do a second lawn mowing, and we've planted some new perennials. May is just about my favorite month, and I'm sad to know it's nearly half over. Luckily, I love all the spring and summer and fall months, so there's a lot to look forward to. May is something special, though!

### The big Three-Oh (2008-05-19 13:03)



May 19: On Saturday, my sweet guy turned 30! That's a big birthday:) The previous Friday, he and a couple friends went to a Brewer's game and had a great evening tailgating and watching the Brewer's pull out a win in the final moments of the game.

On his birthday, we drove up to Minnesota for Maretta's graduation. First, though, we made a stop in Northfield where we had lunch at Hogan Brothers. Mmmmm. Carleton was holding its annual rugby reunion, so we went up to the rugby fields and spend an hour or two watching a rugby match and chatting with old friends. Bryan played rugby for a few years in college, and it was fun to watch him hold Andrew and show the little guy a few scrums.

Then we drove the rest of the way up to St. Paul and got to see Marettta and Kyle's new apartment on Grand Avenue. It's really a fun place for them. I'm so excited that they get to start their life together! We went out to dinner with my family and Kyle's parents, and we had rhubarb dessert (my mom's yummy recipe) for Bryan's birthday cake. It was an action-packed day, and I'm hoping to get to take him out soon for a dinner just him and me. It was a beautiful day for a birthday. Happy 30th, honey!

**Marettta is a graduate! (2008-05-19 13:23)**



May 19: It's hard to believe that Marettta has completed her education at St. Kate's! It seems like just last year that we were dropping her off for her freshman year. It was a beautiful day. Michael, Joe, Becky, Dad, Terry, Marilyn and Bob (Kyle's parents), and our family of four were all on hand to celebrate this milestone. Most of us weren't able to attend the actual graduation (Marettta only had four tickets), so we watched it on TV from her dorm room. She graduated Cum Laude with bachelor's degree in theater. We're all really proud of her! Way to go, Dolly! Now that she's graduated, moved out of her dorm room, and "moved" into her new apartment, the next step is her wedding. No problem

Pictures from the weekend are in the gallery.



### **The wedding is in two days! (2008-05-22 19:49)**

May 22: Maretta and Kyle's wedding is in just two days! I've been having a good time frantically coordinating details. Maretta is such an easy bride, and everyone involved is so laid back and wonderful...it's been a fun event to organize. We're expecting 150 people. Maretta had her hair trial today, and we went makeup shopping for her this afternoon. The groom and his guys (including Bryan) are out having fun tonight.

My to-do list for tomorrow is much shorter, and mostly includes getting my toes and fingernails painted and visiting with Heather and Michael and their new baby and then doing the rehearsal and the rehearsal dinner. Yay! Next week is going to feel like a vacation:)

### **My sister is married! (2008-05-24 20:39)**



May 24: I've got a new brother:) Maretta and Kyle were married today, and everything was simply beautiful. We'll be getting photos from the photographer in a week, but for now I've uploaded around 50 pics I took from the day. I also posted pictures from the past couple days of getting readiness.

From start to finish, the day was just lovely. The day dawned sunny. All the lilac bushes are in bloom, and it seemed like warmth and bird songs and spring color were filling the world.

Maretta, Laurie (her maid of honor), Marilyn (Kyle's mom), Pam (Kyle's sister), and I met at nine this morning to get our hair made all pretty. I stopped by the reception site (Nakoma Country Club) to check on things, and it all

looked just beautiful. So many pretty flowers, silver and white, and green-bedecked tables. We all had a fun time getting ready together, and then the ceremony began at 12:30.

Terry and I walked Maretta down the first half of the aisle and then Dad walked her down the rest of the way to Kyle. I've uploaded the wedding program for your reading pleasure. The hymn "For the beauty of the earth" really kind of did me in. It was a beautiful ceremony. Kyle cried, they both laughed; at one point, Maretta gave a two thumbs up to the congregation. They sounded so true and monumental saying their vows, and they both looked so young and happy and fresh and in love. I couldn't have wished them a more beautiful ceremony.

The reception was a luncheon buffet, starting out with some mingling and nibblings and greetings. It was a lot of fun to meet many of Kyle's relatives, and with the stunning daylight streaming in the windows, we all ate and drank and laughed and enjoyed that post-wedding happy feeling.

Sylvie traveled around the room...I think I only held her when she needed to eat, and I barely heard a peep out of her all day. She was a jolly, dimply smiling girl. Andrew fell asleep on the car ride to the reception, so he spent the first part of the reception angelically sleeping on a sofa. Then he had fun munching on the yummy food and playing with his aunts and uncles.

We sent the couple off with a cloud of bubbles, and they then went on a carriage ride for an hour.

Our clan headed over to Terry's after the reception, and the bride and groom stopped by after their carriage ride to say hello. What a lovely day. I am so bushed! It went so well. Most importantly, Maretta and Kyle are now hitched, and they can begin their lives together. What an amazing thing.



**Fist set of pictures from the photographer (2008-05-25 15:57)**



May 25: We've gotten to see quite a bit of the bride and groom today. This morning, we met at Terry's and watched as they opened up their wedding gifts. I have a sort of post-race euphoria going on. Seeing everyone so content and glowing is a real treat.

This afternoon, our little clan went to a local park to attend my friend Sarah's birthday party. We brought several of the table bouquets from the wedding reception, and it was fun to get to share their prettiness with more people.

Maretta and Kyle stopped by our house a few minutes ago. They spent some time getting things from Dad's house and then went to visit Michael and Joe. They're being quite generous with their newly-wed selves:) Tomorrow they head up to St. Paul to spend a week honeymooning in their own new apartment.

Late last night our photographer, Dick Baker, sent me a big, early set of photos from the wedding. Thanks Dick! You can find them in the gallery.

Is this what normal feels like? (2008-05-27 12:51)



May 27: Andrew is napping this afternoon. Sylvie woke up just as I was putting him down, and she is now rather happily perched on my lap as I type. It's nice to be able to type and kiss bald baby head at the same time. I'm sitting here in the relative quiet and feeling a sense of a new existence. Like I'm at the ocean's edge, and the tide all went out and I'm seeing that the starfish-filled tide pools are a very different landscape from the waves that were present a few hours ago. Life post-wedding; life with two kids; life not going to work at Gathering Waters; life being a full-time mom (with no immediate wedding planning) in the summer.

Yesterday (Memorial Day) I really unwound. Bryan was Mr. Accomplishing, mulching garden beds, cleaning the gutters, staining planks of wood to make a picnic bench. Me? I read a Barbara Kingsolver book and sorted through bags of 6-12 month clothes, pulled out 0-3 month clothes that are too small, and in general re-organized Sylvie's dresser and closet. I should mention again that I LOVE baby clothes. I love touching them and folding them and creating new outfits. And I love putting them on my little ones. I think I decided to dive into clothes because it most certainly did not need to be done. And I wanted to do something that I didn't need to do. The last couple weeks have been quite full of prioritized lists, so it felt good to pick an off-the-list task. Plus, I now have new things to put on my sweet princess pottywotkykins.

My co-worker Pam goes back to work today. Her daughter Mercy is a week younger than Sylvie, and so her first day back at work makes me quite aware that I am not going back to work. I've got to say, though, that while I miss seeing my co-workers and thinking critically and having conversations that don't involve kids and doing work that I really think makes Wisconsin a better place, I don't really miss my job. It's summer, and I get to be outdoors with the kids and have Andrew give me big hugs and say things like, "I'll love you forever, Mommy."

Last night I wrote up a list of meals to make for the week, and this morning the kiddos and I went to Woodman's. They are remarkably good shoppers, and Andrew is even tending to leave the house cheerfully (AMAZING). Sylvie is happy in the front carrier, and we happily shopped together, purchasing over \$200 worth of food. Good heavens, I must be crazy. On the other hand, I'm making lots of meals that will have leftovers, and I'm not eating out much for lunch any more. Because I am slightly compulsive and type-A, I made a Woodman's shopping list laid out like the store is to try to streamline the shopping process. Feel free to copy and use yourself if you'd like. These are the kinds of things I do when I don't have a job:) Oh, and my dad made a very similar list when I was a kid, so I come by it genetically.

Heather and Michael and Evelyn were in town for Maretta's wedding, so I got to see them all, if only quite briefly. I'm going out to DC in August for Kacy's wedding, and I'm hoping to spend significantly more time with them then. Evie is soooo cute and tiny. Just one month old:)

My stream of consciousness is faltering, and Sylvie would like me to interact with her now. The muffled explosions emanating from her nether regions may need to be dealt with on the changing table as well. Have a happy summer!

### **Three years later (2008-05-27 13:24)**

May 27: I'm glad Maretta and Kyle got married on Memorial Day weekend. It gives us a new association with the weekend, and I think that's a good thing. The last several days, I keep finding my mind floating back to Memorial Day weekend 2005, when Mom was first diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

I no longer am stuck reliving and thinking through those last weeks of Mom's life. For almost six months after she was gone, my brain was doing some sort of a backward coping thing...I thought back each of her last weeks obsessively, most especially the really hard conversations, the gut wrenching shifts. I think that at the time we just had to do what needed to be done and there wasn't really the time or space to be sad or reflect too much. So I reflected afterwards. It was kind of a relief when my brain decided it had worked through, say the week of August 6 enough and we could move back to the week of July 30. Then I got back to the end of June, and these days, I don't think about last summer much at all. I find I can think about the bigger picture much more. For quite a while, I couldn't even really remember or focus on memories before Mom got sick.

On the Thursday before Memorial Day, 2005, Mom went into the doctor to check on what she thought was a bladder infection. She called me from the hospital at work and said, "I'm in the hospital, but don't worry...they're just checking on what I think is a bladder infection. You and Bryan can stop by this evening if you'd like." The next day (May 27, 2005) when they did a catscan, they started using the word "mass" to describe a blockage that they found in her pancreatic duct.

I remember climbing into bed next to her before one of her tests, and I asked if she was scared. "Not scared," she said. "Just sad."

Today three years ago, I was just beginning to read about pancreatic cancer. It's a horrible disease to learn about. I remember thinking, "This can't be happening," over and over. At one point, Bryan came over while I was reading, and I remember showing him some of the charts of median life expectancy. He didn't believe it. It was just too terrible to comprehend. I recall reading this exact passage:

Median survival from diagnosis is around 3 to 6 months; 5-year survival is much less than 5 % With 32,180 new diagnoses in the United States every year, and 31,800 deaths, mortality approaches 99 %, giving pancreatic cancer the highest fatality rate of all cancers and the fourth highest cancer killer in the United States amongst both men and women.

The upside of our story is that Mom got over two good years after diagnosis. I was eight months pregnant when she was diagnosed, and Mom lived long enough that her grandson remembers her. We had so many good times in the last years, and I'm grateful that we all had time to say goodbye. But it still just totally and completely sucks. And this weekend, which I always think of as the turning point between spring and summer also became in our lives the turning point between "ordinary" and "coping with cancer."

I'm glad that it's now also the weekend that Maretta and Kyle got married. It's such a lovely time of year.

Sylvie at 3 1/2 months (2008-05-27 13:54)



May 27: Sylvia is so engaged and so aware...I just am amazingly in love with her! The last week or so, I find myself making regular mental notes of things I want to post about her. So here's a stream-of-consciousness update about Sylvia.

- This little girl is strong. She's been holding her head up well since about four weeks. She's been standing strongly for at least a month. Of course, she wobbles all over the place, but she has been able to support her own weight since early May. I've had the exersaucer out for her to stand in, and she's getting now where she can (at least somewhat) purposefully turn herself in a circle. She's able to move toys if her hand is on them, but she still has some steps to make before she'll be able to have the muscle and brain coordination to grab an object that she wants.
- I've moved her up to the size three diapers. I feel like that means that she's a huge person now. We've been using disposables although I have the cloth ones right under the changing table. Maybe soon I'll start integrating them in:) We moved up to size three when she started having "blow-outs" from both legs and the back of her size twos. Fun stuff.

- She wants nothing to do with her swing. In fact, I should probably give it back to my friend. She starts "singing" the moment I put her in it.
- On the other hand (and I almost feel like I should whisper this so as to not break the spell), she's not so angry in her car seat any more. After that long, horrible ride home from the Twin Cities a couple weeks back, our driving experiences have been nearly pleasant. I've been bringing a soft blanket-y toy for her to hold, and we've done several across-town trips without any crying. This is dramatic. This is stunning. I would be so happy if she got over the carseat=torture idea.
- She rolled over twice...with assistance. Late last week, I had her in the middle of the bed on her tummy and she rolled into the mattress valley where I sleep. She's getting squirmy-er and more interested in being mobile each day.
- She adores her brother...and her dad. Andrew loves to hug and kiss and wildly embrace and "dance" with Sylvia. She has a large tolerance for his physical demonstrations of love, and I can tell from how her face lights up that she thinks he's just the bees knees. We tell him to watch her face to see if she's OK with what he's doing, and that seems to work pretty well. When he makes her cry, he gives her soft kisses and says, "I'm sorry, Sylvie ba-dilve!" When Bryan comes home, Sylvie's face lights up, and both her dimples jump out. She's doing the open-mouth grin when she's really happy. And seeing her dad makes her really happy!
- She's waking up a couple times in the night. Usually I feed her around 10:30 before I go to bed. Then she eats at 1 and 4. The last few days, she's been sleeping a bit later...maybe 7 instead of 6. Then she's usually awake for an hour before taking a two hour morning nap. She's been sleeping in her crib except when I'm too exhasuted in the night to nurse her in the rocking chair and bring her to bed instead. While I'm still kind of tired some mornings, she's pretty good about eating in about 15 minutes and then going straight back to bed.
- I use two white noise machines to help her sleep. For naps and when I put her down at night, I usually nurse her and then lay her down awake. I turn on Mom's sleep sheep with the waves sound and then I turn on the noise machine that I bought just for her. She often falls asleep without a peep. It helps that she's using a pacifier.
- She's wearing a wide range of sizes of baby clothes. She still fits in most of the 0-3 month, although they are a little snug. 3-6 month fit her well, and she can wear quite a few 6-12 month items. This is the heyday for adorable little baby girl clothes! I've just started putting her in pajamas at night. Before this, she just wore her clothes because it seemed silly to change her again.
- Sylvie doesn't spit up. She's probably urp-ed about 10 times ever. Sometimes she gets kind of drooly, but that's mostly when she tries to fit her fist in her mouth.
- Sylvie cries most when she feels she has been offended. Like if I bump her on something or I don't respond to her cries fast enough or I ignore her when she asks to be removed from the @ # \$ % car seat. When she is offended, she cries really gustily. It can be a little breath-taking
- If we're walking and she's in the front carrier, she's almost always happy.
- She's happily passed around to loads of different people. As long as she's not too tired or hungry, she's an amazingly social and radiant little person.

So that's a little picture into Sylvia at 15 weeks.



## Relay for Life 2008 (2008-05-27 14:08)



May 27: The last few years, my brother Joe has participated in Relay for Life to raise money for the American Cancer Society. He's working on it again this year, so if you're interested in supporting cancer research, click below to see how you can help.

Hello all! This is Joe, Althea's youngest brother. De Forest, the town I went to high school in, has an annual Relay For Life (an event organized by the American Cancer Society) every June. It's a pretty big event. Team are made up of 10-15 people, and each person on the team agrees to try and raise at least \$100. Then, the day of the event rolls around and everyone comes together at the high school's track. The event runs from 6 in the evening until 7 or 8 the next day. There is a candlelight ceremony and talks from cancer survivors.

The event has been running in De Forest for 10 years or so and has raised over a million dollars since its first year. A friend I've had since first grade formed the team "Carpe Diem" and so I am raising money for the team. If you'd like to donate, feel free to send any dollar amount ( \$10 or \$25 as a suggestion) as a check made out to the American Cancer Society to:

Joe Babler  
4575 Dennis Drive  
Madison, WI 53704

You can also donate online directly to our team.

The event will be held on June 13th.

Furthermore, I can purchase luminarias that they line the track with at the event and write "In Honor/In Memory" of anyone that you would like. It's \$5 per bag. Just send along any names that you want.

Thanks!

Joe

**Andrew at two years, eleven months (2008-05-27 14:47)**



May 27: While Sylvie is reaching out to touch the world in new ways, Andrew seems to be diving deep into a pool and coming out with some fascinating treasures. The things this kid says just amaze me. He's so sweet and loving and opinionated and reticent and agreeable and single-minded and charming and tenacious. He'll be three on June 22, and he already seems like he's stepping out of the two's of babyhood and into the three's of a preschooler. So here's a few things that come to mind to summarize little Andrew at this precious stage of life.

- Occasionally I try counting to encourage Andrew to do what I want. (For example, "OK, hon, I'll count to three, and then we'll both jump up and bounce out the door like kangaroos.") It doesn't work. But Andrew seemed to note the technique, and the other day he said to me, "OK, Mommy, I'll count to four, and then you'll either blow bubbles or we'll watch a show."
- Since early March, we've been working on potty training. He figured out how to use the potty by late March, and by late April, he didn't want to use either a little potty seat or the little donut you put on a big toilet to make it easier for kids to use. Until May, I had to remind him (read *Make Him*) use the toilet every two hours or else an accident ensued, but for the last several weeks, he seems to have it figured out. He's even been wearing

underpants at night for the last couple weeks. And (knock on wood) he has yet to have an accident. However, I know I'm tempting fate and need to buy a water-proof mattress pad STAT. It's all gone pretty smoothly (other than the "NOOO I DON'T WANT TO USE THE POTTY" followed by very wet pants episode that occurred in the library), and I feel good that it's really all be led by him. He still wants me to dress and undress him, but he's listening to his body, and I think we can put him firmly in the big boy camp now.

- Every morning, he crawls into bed to hug and kiss and snuggle Sylvie. I never knew that a little boy could loving doat on his baby sister so much.
- Sylvia's crying (which at times has been frequent) seems to sedate Andrew. While she's crying as we drive all the way across town, he falls asleep. Otherwise, he's just half-lidded and kind of limp. I'm so glad that it doesn't seem to agrevate him!
- We've been reading *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. He throws himself around the room while I read, but he remembers parts, and he asks for more and more. It makes me so happy to read a book that I really enjoy to him before bed at night!
- As the weather has warmed this spring, we've discovered that Andrew is quite a monkey. He's amazingly physically aware and able when playing on the jungle gym. And he goes high and slides down poles and reaches out to step across big gaps. My philosophy is that if a kid feels comfortable, can do it themselves, and is using the equipment appropriately, then they're probably alright. But it's pretty nerve-wracking to watch him climb well over my head. He acts like he's in his element.
- Many days, Andrew asks for a whole banana, un-peels it, has one bite, and wants nothing more to do with it.
- Andrew's favorite foods are oatmeal, cottage cheese, grapes, blueberries, chicken (without anything funky or green on it), pretzels, yogurt, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, apple sauce, soybeans, cheeseburgers, grilled cheese sandwiches, popcorn, and oh, the list goes on. But nothing with fishy green things like parsley on it. Although he does love to help pick parsley from the garden as long as it doesn't go on his food.
- Andrew loves to make up stories, and the imaginary world is very closely entwined with the real world. The best way I have of making him go along with something I want him to do is to tell him a story (jumping straight into the climax..."Suddenly a tiger jumped out of the bushes at little Andy...") or asking him like he is a baby animal and I am the mommy animal.
- Andrew's 2T clothes fit him, but 3T is fitting better, and I'm thinking I may jump ahead to 4Ts as I get him some summer PJs and t-shirts. He has a very long torso. Just like his daddy.
- In the evenings when we watch a "showie," Andrew's favorite these days is the David Attenborough Mammals documentaries. A boy after my own heart.
- Andrew has the alphabet mastered (lower case too now), and we're starting to work on words. Just simple ones. He likes to try to make words out of his letters in the tub. "No," I'll say, "JKQZ is not a word." He sometimes knows CAT, DOG, BOY, GIRL, and BOOK.
- He loves poems, and he often recites them at appropriate times. Like the other day when we came to the door, he said, "If you are a dreamer, come in." That's from *Invitation from Shel Silverstein*. Or he'll mix up the starting letters and say, "litle Aaack Orner, At in a Orner, Eating is Ismas Eye." snicker,snicker.
- And he's sometimes still taking naps. Like today! Which allowed me to write these posts:)

So that's my little guy in brief. He's pretty fun these days!

**Pretty Sylvie (2008-05-28 12:49)**

May 28: Here's a video I took of Sylvia. I was hoping she would smile or laugh or something, but instead she's just looking at me. A short video of my little girl doing nothing in particular:)

**Special instructions for people like me (2008-05-29 13:55)**



May 29: I'm trying to make a fruit terrine that was featured in Wondertime magazine as I strained the jarred pineapple juice into the already strained mandarin orange juice in a saucepan, I read in the recipe, "drain the grapefruit juice into a pan."

Grapefruit, pineapple. They're both compound worded fruits. Too bad that pineapple contains an enzyme that prevents it from turning into a gelatin.

The funny part, was upon realizing my mistake, I started scanning the recipe, hoping to find something that said something along the lines of:

"If you accidentally purchased pineapple instead of grapefruit, don't fear! Pat yourself on the back for attempting a new recipe, finding the jarred pineapple in the first place, and even for just navigating the grocery store with two kids! Instead of the terrine, try making the fruit salad identified below."

No such alternative instructions were to be found. Either they ran out of space on the page or they presumed that most people would actually purchase the ingredients identified. Hmm. Now I'm two hours from dinner and both dinners I have planned have to marinate for 6-12 hours. This may or may not be the best planning.  
:)

### **Making Sylvie laugh (2008-05-31 07:29)**

May 31: Andrew and Sylvia were pretty cute together yesterday. Here's a video of Andrew singing to Sylvia to make her laugh.

Lyrics to the song Andrew is singing (he's being silly by saying the words with different starting letters):

A number 10 from Tennessee  
Kissed a blueberry-beaked budgie  
And after that he lay in bed  
While ten blueberries grew on his head

(counts as the blueberries pop out all over the number 10)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

The doctor said "I have a cure  
Stay in bed for ten days more."

(counts off the days on the calendar)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

When that old ten felt well again  
He jumped and counted one to ten

(The number ten flexes his muscles then jumps on his bed)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Now, number ten will always love  
All creatures great and small  
But he will never kiss another  
Fruit-flavored animal

(as each number is counted off, weird fruit-shaped animals pop up)

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

**A really wonderful day (2008-05-31 13:01)**

May 31: On Friday, my co-worker, Vicki, and her son Alex came over to our house, and we had a wonderful time. Sylvia took a couple of very long morning naps, and then when she woke, she was so happy. Sleep begets sleep, and she also went down for a nice early afternoon nap. Andrew and Alex had a blast playing together. They colored and ran around the yard and practiced using the potty. I had gotten enough sleep the night before, and I just felt really good. We all made blueberry muffins, and Vicki and I got to visit for four hours...delightful. It's so fun to watch Andrew and Alex play together. Compared to where they were a year ago, they're such big boys! Pictures of the last few days are in the gallery.



## 4.6 June

### Bryan's first software ships (2008-06-05 06:46)



June 5: Bryan's been working extra-hard the last several weeks as he has been completing the first release of the software that he has been designing. He started at OpGen last September, and he's really been enjoying it. You can see his blog post about completing the software here. He also wrote three posts describing what his company does on his blog, which I have posted below.

Here comes the science, Part 1

I've been wanting for some time to make a post or two to try and explain the basics of the science that is the core of our company. The techniques described here are in the public domain so there's nothing secret here. I've been working here long enough that I now feel pretty confident that I understand the process at a fairly high level.. just the right amount to be able to describe it to someone else that might find it interesting. For part 1 here, I will just describe the basic premise and will cover more actual detail in later posts. I've really enjoyed learning this stuff and I hope that other people find it interesting too.

The "Op" stands for Optical

The company's name, OpGen, is based on the fact that the core scientific process behind the business is called "optical mapping" which is, in short, a technique for taking physical samples of DNA and creating a visual representation of it such that unique organisms can be easily differentiated from each other and similarities between other organisms can be easily spotted. The whole concept is that you can break up DNA into many fragments and then put those fragments together in a line and you get what we call a "map". What's useful about this is that similar organisms will consistently and repeatedly break up in the same way such that their maps are very similar. As you'll see later, these maps almost look like barcodes and you can actually think of them as such, or as a "fingerprint" which uniquely identifies an organism. Here's an example of what one might look like:



What's it for?

The most interesting applications for optical mapping that I am aware of are in the area of what we call "comparative genomics" (other people might call it something else). Basically, it's the practice of looking at a number of similar or

related organisms and analyzing what's different about them. For instance, say you have maps of two isolates of the same species of bacteria that cause infections in humans.

Furthermore, say that one of those isolates is known to be extremely nasty and hard to treat, while the other is easily killed off with a round of antibiotics. By comparing the maps of these two bugs, you can actually see where the two are genetically different. Those parts that are different most likely indicate where the nastiness of the bacteria is regulated and can point the way for researchers to know where to look when trying to figure out how to combat that strain.

Coming soon...

In future posts I'll tell you more detail about how we actually create those maps and talk about the software I'm working on and how it pertains to these maps.

Here comes the science, Part 2

This time around I'm going to dive down into a little more detail about what actually goes on in the process of making this optical maps of DNA samples. At a theoretical level, the process is fairly straight forward and sounds pretty basic. However, as I'm learning while working here, real life does not think very highly of our nice, simple, straight-forward theories. So the process has to be very robust, especially on the software side, which makes me very glad that I work with a lot of really smart people.

Making DNA lay down straight

The whole linchpin of this process is being able to measure the length of the strands of DNA (more accurately, the lengths of DNA fragments but we'll get to that shortly). In order for length to have any meaning, we need to have the subjects we're measuring be as close to a straight line as possible. In order to do that we use a glass surface (you remember those microscope slides you used in high school) and a cover slip that has microscopically small channels carved into it. The DNA is placed, in solution, onto this surface and, using a magical process I know nothing about, the DNA is stretched out along those channels which serve as guides for straightening out the molecules.

Cutting it up into fragments

In order to create meaningful maps that can be used to identify and compare organisms we need to break up the DNA molecules into fragments.

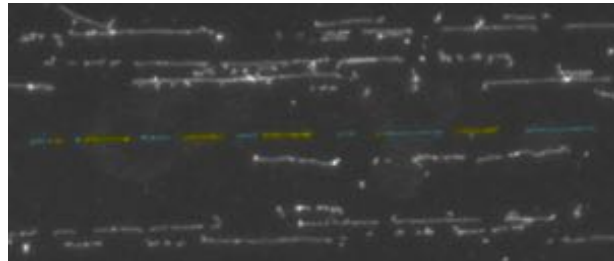
It's these fragments that we measure to create that nice-looking barcode map. In order to create those maps you use what is called a "restriction enzyme", which are enzymes that actually cut DNA. A particular restriction enzyme always cuts in the same place, at a particular occurrence of base pairs in the DNA strand. For example, the enzyme BamHI cuts at restriction sites of GGATCC. As an aside, most restriction enzymes cut at sites that are palindromic.. there's no obvious reason that I know of why that is, but it sure is a neat coincidence. Due to the genetic makeup of different organisms, different enzymes will cut different numbers of fragments for each organism. Part of our process is picking an enzyme that will cut the "right number" of fragments, that is, enough to make a meaningful map.

Too few fragments or too many fragments often make the maps indistinguishable from each other.

Measuring those fragments

As part of the preparation of the DNA, a stain is applied that will cause the fragments to light up or "fluoresce" when

exposed to a laser. The glass slip containing the DNA solution is placed on a fluorescent microscope that has a camera attached to it and an automated software system moves the camera up and down the length of those channels and takes pictures through the microscope. Here's an example of what it looks like. Remember this is one tiny fraction of a single image from the microscope. You can see several broken strands of DNA. The colored one is one that has been picked out by the software as clean enough to be measured and recorded.



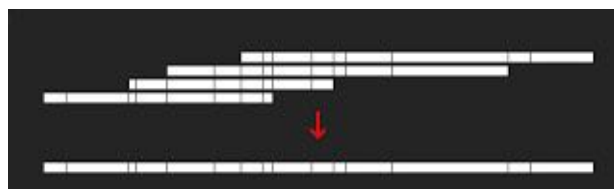
Hundreds of such images are acquired and finally fed through some image processing software that finds the nicest looking DNA molecules and it finds the fragments and measures their length in some unit of measure that is smaller than anything I can image. Finally those fragment lengths are recorded in order and they can be visually represented by that barcode-like display I showed last time. Here's an artists interpretation of how that looks:



### Assembling the pieces

Here's where the real world comes in and whacks you in the head. DNA will almost never stay fully in tact throughout the process I just described. And even if it did, there are usually a lot of molecules and they tend to overlap each other or they don't straighten out exactly right (or sometimes at all). So what you end up with is lots and lots of small maps that represent just a chunk of the entire strand of DNA.

And here is where some intense computing power is brought to bear on the problem as we take all of those smaller maps and try and determine how and where they overlap each other. It's kind of analogous to trying to put a piece of paper back together after it has been through a shredder. When this process is finally done (and everything worked out okay) you end up with a "consensus map", which is the amalgamation of all of those smaller map chunks.



Once you've got that consensus map, then the doors open to a wide range of things you can do with it and that's where the software that I'm working on comes into play. But I'll save that stuff for the third and final installment of

this series. Thanks for reading!

Here comes the science, Part 3

Before I went on hiatus it was just about time to talk about the software that I've been working on and how it pertains to the process of working with optical genome maps and actually doing something interesting with them.

#### Building a database

As I mentioned in previous posts the most interesting thing you can do with an optical map is to compare it to other maps of similar genomes for the purposes of looking at similarities and differences. But in order to do that you need a repository of maps and way of categorizing and searching that repository to find what you're looking for. We didn't have anything like that at the time I started so it was the first thing I worked on and we now have a nicely categorized, searchable database of over 40,000 genome maps.

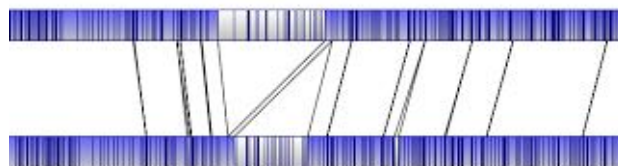
#### Making maps in software

Creating optical maps is currently a time-consuming process and we'd need a lot of people to make 40,000 maps by hand. The vast majority of those maps that we have in the database are what are called "in-silico" maps, which is a cutesy way of saying that they were made in software. When you think about what mapping is, you're taking little bits and pieces of DNA and cutting it up with an enzyme and then measuring the fragments that get created. We don't necessarily know what the actual DNA sequence of that genome is and it's actually irrelevant for the purposes of creating optical maps (which can be very helpful, which I'll describe later). However there are plenty of people out there who are working hard at sequencing the genomes of all sorts of organisms.

We can take those sequences (the literal nucleotide sequence, e.g. ATCGGACT) and simulate the process of applying a restriction enzyme to cut that sequence into fragments to create in-silico maps. Luckily someone out there already wrote libraries for doing these sorts of things so it was pretty easy to use that code to populate our database.

#### Comparing maps

Really the critical functionality of the software I'm working on is the ability to compare maps to each other. In a nutshell we compare maps by looking at the series of fragments in each map and use some complicated math that I'll likely never understand to figure out whether or not they're "close enough" to each other to confidently say that they probably represent the same underlying DNA structure. While it's very likely that the actual DNA sequences are different in some respects, those differences are small enough that they don't show up at the map level. And we can reasonably assume that these are regions of similarity between the genomes. Using maps these similarities and differences are very easy to visualize.. here's an example of a couple of similar strains of *P.aeruginosa* :



The purple parts are regions of similarity while the white parts represent regions that do not appear to be similar at all. It's immediately obvious where these particular strains differ and where they appear to have common structure.

### Extracting meaning

All of these leads up to my final point which is how you can use this software for comparing maps to extract meaning. As we know, the DNA structure of organisms dictates what they look like and what they are capable of in the physical world. In our particular realm we're mainly looking at bacteria.. specifically bacteria that make people sick.

There are a lot of species of bacteria that make people sick and, within those species, there are several sub-species or strains that act differently. Some are particularly nasty, some are immune to certain antibiotic medications, and some are just run-of-the-mill . Since these strains are all of the same species they (frequently, but not always) end up sharing a lot of similar DNA. So by comparing maps of the different strains you can fairly easily see places where the DNA structure differs and that can really help you isolate the region of the genome that is cause a particular strain to be especially nasty.

I guess that's about it for now .. this is getting pretty long. I may revisit this topic a little later as more code gets written and I start in on more new things. Right now I'm kind of in the middle of a round of bug-fixing and polish and that' s just not that interesting!! Bye for now.

### Early June days (2008-06-08 17:59)



May 8: It's been a good week. Pictures are in the gallery. We're having some major rain events the last couple days. And Sylvia has been on an anti-nap jag, which is not OK. But in general, things are good. I've been having fun reading a blog I enjoy, Pioneer Woman. She's written up a thirty-some chapter recounting of the story of how she met and married her cowboy husband. As she says, " ~~x~~ ~~x~~ Green Acres meets Harlequin Romance in my crazy, rip-roarin' real-life tale of true love." It's been quite entertaining.

Last weekend Sylvia and I attended Becky's high school graduation ceremony. The little one didn't like the cheers or the cymbals crashing one bit, but in general she did a great job.

Last week we had a lovely evening at Lake Wingra next to Michael's Frozen Custard. Andrew loved climbing all over the playground, and we all enjoyed a picnic, ice cream, frisbee and teatherball, and a walk down to the lake. Terry's mom, Topsy, is visiting from Oregon, so we're having fun seeing her.

On Thursday, Andrew, Sylvie, and I drove out to Jack's house for a little overnight trip. We met Terry, Tom, Topsy, and Terry's Aunt Rusty who is visiting from Minnesota. Andrew took me on an adventurous walk toward the woods as we hunted for a bear. The brambles turned us back, and we ended up trying to find purple treasure flowers (a.k.a. spiderwort) instead. That little kid has an amazing imagination. Andrew had a good time playing with Tom and getting read to by Topsy and Rusty.

Today, our friends Jessica and Mitch came over for lunch, and then we watched Eli and Celia while their parents went to look at a house around the corner that they are considering.

As I type, Sylvie is sitting next to me grinning and sucking on her hands. Andrew is raptly watching Monsters Inc. for the first time.

A nice, rainy Sunday evening treat.



**Wedding photos for your printing pleasure (2008-06-08 18:16)**



May 8: We recently received the digital version of the photos for Mareta and Kyle's wedding. I've uploaded the pictures to Walgreens.com, and you are welcome to log on there and print out any pictures you'd like. What lovely memories I have from that day!

**Good times (2008-06-11 07:18)**



June 11: We had a lovely day yesterday! After many days of rain, I was ready for a sunny day. The weekend and Monday were a little rough sleep-wise. Sylvie kinda stopped napping during the day, and she decided to wake up every hour and a half or two hours at night. On Monday, I felt really fuzzy and groggy and unable to finish thoughts or be particularly coherent. Tuesday, though, we went with Kathy, Alivia, and Rayna to our neighborhood park where we played and picnicked for over five hours. I had no idea so much time had gone by. THEN, both children slept at the same time for nearly two hours. This really hasn't happened before. 45 minutes, 20 minutes...possible. But an hour! Two! Oh, bliss. I let Sylvie sleep on my lap for the first hour. These days I don't let her do that much because I don't want her to need to sleep on my lap, but I really wanted her to sleep. Then for the second hour of her long nap (the longest in days), I was not doing anything for either child. It was amazing.

Last night, I was home alone in the evening and both kids went down smoothly. Sylvia didn't nurse from 8pm until 3:30 am. I slept from 11pm until 3:30 straight. Oh delicious REM sleep. It does so much for a person's mental health. Over four hours of continuous sleep was just what the doctor ordered. In fact, when she got up again at 4:30, I couldn't fall asleep afterwards because I felt so very rested. I wanted to get things done!

Today we're planning to hang out with Jessica, Eli, and Ceila. The weather seems promising again. Should be a fun, fun day!

Andrew is currently negotiating with me to go "All by myself to JabaCat." (really Java Cat).

I said, "What if someone sees you riding alone to JabaCat and says, 'Little boy, where is your mother?'"

Andrew said, "I would tell them, 'She's at home!'"

He's now saying, "I'm getting ready...I'm ready to go. I can put on my shoes all by myself."

I think I may need to intervene here.

**Rain and sun (2008-06-13 07:32)**



June 13: The good news - our basement didn't flood again last night. We had some major down pouring, but the ground must have un-saturated enough over the last few days to give our old concrete basement walls a chance to hold back the flood. We had a nice week - a great picnic with Kathy and Alivia and Rayna at our local park, playtime with Jessica and Eli and Celia, and today we're going to see Pam and Clara. Pictures from the last several days (including some baby-in-the-bath pics) are in the gallery.

Lots of fun + lack of sleep = fewer posts (2008-06-21 13:19)



June 21: Since I started staying home, I've been posting pretty frequently, so I was kind of surprised to note that I hadn't done a post in a full week. Part of the issue is that Sylvia hasn't been sleeping well. She's back to waking up every 1-2 hours at night and hasn't been napping during the day. Andrew hasn't been napping at all either, and that has left me with little time or energy for logging on to the computer!

But despite our lack of sleep, we're also having lots of fun. Bryan's parents came into town on Thursday, and we're having a good time enjoying Andrew's last days of being two. Tomorrow he turns three!

Pictures that I uploaded earlier in the week are in the gallery.

Ooooo a new camera! (2008-06-21 13:51)



June 21: I am the very lucky owner of a new camera. A snazzy SLR with which I can do all kinds of need photography actions. I get a little tight in my throat just thinking about how cool it is:) It's a gift from Terry, and I've been voracioulsy reading all I can about photography and Photoshop. My new way of keeping my brain engaged and expressing my creativity is going to be photography. And while I tend to take a dozen or so pictures each day on my point-and-shoot camera, I think I'd like to learn how to take really nice portrait pictures of the kiddos in my life. I don't want to decrease the number of snap-shots that I'm taking, so I've decided to kind of segregate the pictures I take with the SLR onto a new Flickr site. I plan to post my pictures that have some degree of artistic merit to the Flickr site, so feel free to check it out.



## Our boy is three! (2008-06-24 18:56)



June 24: We sent Granny Lu home today after a really nice visit here the last several days. She and Grandad arrived on Thursday night, and we had a fun time together celebrating Andrew's third birthday. On his actual birthday on Sunday, we had a great time at Wingra Park with my family and Sarah and Wes and Bryan's parents. Andrew is officially three now! Pictures are in the gallery.

A couple good recent comments by the young man:

Breakfast conversation with his dad:

Bryan: Andrew, please eat the crusts of your bread, not just the middle

Andrew: I don't want to eat my crusts.

Bryan: Well, you know, you need to learn to eat your crusts because grown-ups eat their crusts.

Andrew: Am I a grown-up?

Bryan: No, not yet.

Andrew: Then I don't need to eat my crusts yet.

gotcha!\*

On our way to a party, Andrew is in his carseat talking to himself:

"This party is going to be a yiddle bit fun. (pause) Not a LOT of fun. A yiddle bit fun."

Andrew's word of the week is (unfortunately) "boring." He's decided that many things are boring. We're part way through a book, and he wants to stop because it is boring. We're watching a DVD, and he informs us that it is boring. Since when did he become so worldly? Maybe since he's three!



Sylvia is rolling (2008-06-24 19:22)



June 24: Sylvia rolled a couple weeks ago, but it wasn't until this past weekend that she really got the hang of it. At one point on Andrew's birthday, she rolled over about 10 times in a row. She's been sleeping in a "snuggle nest" infant bed that helps the great-big crib feel a little more cozy for a little tiny baby. But last night, she was rolling around and got herself all cock-eyed. So I took down the play-silk canopy I had hanging over the crib and took out the snuggle nest, and tonight she's sleeping in the full crib just like a big (?) girl.

The little one has been rather unhappy the last couple days. I think her teeth are bothering her. She's also been continuing to wake up every hour or two all night long. It's just not cool. But she doesn't believe me. Or speak English.

Pictures uploaded (2008-06-26 07:30)



June 26: Happy birthday yesterday, Maretta! We missed spending the day with you:)

Last night, Sylvia did a three-hour stretch and two two-hour stretches of sleep. Soooo much better than waking up every hour from 2am to 6am. So much better. That and I went to bed at 8:30 or 9 pm last night, so I woke this morning feeling like a much perkier person.

I've been trying to upload photos from Andrew's birthday and the days preceding, but it's been my record-slowest upload ever. I picked out the pictures. Got interrupted. Set the pictures to upload. Got interrupted twice. Uploaded one set. Interrupt. Upload second set. Interrupt. Add captions to one... you got the story. So this morning, I was able to finish adding captions, and I'm posting this while Sylvia is in her exersaucer watching Andrew who is making matches of his memory cards.

Some good pictures in these sets. Enjoy!

Andrew's birthday party

The days preceding Andrew's birthday.

**Our day in pictures (2008-06-26 20:12)**



June 26: It's 10pm, and I'm about to turn in to bed in an attempt to be rested again tomorrow. We had a really lovely day today. Spent most of the day at Jessica's house where Andrew and Eli had a blast being silly (and remarkably imaginative) boys together. Janelle, Vianne, and Shay came over, and we all made tissue paper window crafts. Sylvie took some naps, Andrew was in a splendid mood, and I was rather rested for the first time in a few days. It was great! Sleep and time with good friends make for a great day.

Pictures from our day are in the gallery as are photos I took of Terry and the kids last night. Enjoy!

**Birthday weekend (2008-06-28 10:13)**



June 28: It's shaping up to be a beautiful weekend. Yesterday Andrew, Sylvia, and I went to Bryan's office to join him for lunch. He's moved from one side of the UW Research Park to the other side, and we hadn't met a couple of his new co-workers. It was fun to see his new digs, and Andrew really enjoyed getting some treats from Bryan's co-worker, Dawn.

After lunch (Hubbard Street Diner...mmm) the kids and I went over to Uncle Bubba's to hang out with the uncles for a bit. Joe ends his work week at noon on Friday. He's splitting his time between an internship at the Madison Symphony (20 hours) and work at Gathering Waters Conservancy (10 hours). Andrew just adores his uncles.



Sylvia's nighttime not-sleeping routine is improving. The last few nights have gotten better and better (it's easy to get better when she was waking up every hour!), and last night she only got up at 1am, 4am, and 6:30am. She even then went back to sleep until 8! I'm sure that my children's sleep patterns are not that interesting to read about, but it so affects the joyfulness of our days!

Tonight we have our third Happy Bambino kiddos birthday party. Then tomorrow is my birthday, and Terry's taking our gang to Ishnala for dinner. Should be fun!

I had forgotten to link to some pictures I took earlier this week. Such cute kids! I couldn't decide which picture to post with this update, so I picked two!



**Bambino birthday at the beach (2008-06-29 08:53)**



June 29: Yesterday evening, we had a great time at the beach with all our "baby friends." Come to think of it, they aren't really babies any more. In fact, they aren't even toddlers any more. We now have a wild pack of preschoolers on our hands!

We all met when our first-borns were only weeks old, and now here they are...three years old! I haven't seen many of the other families in months, so it was a lot of fun to get together for a blustery evening at Vilas Park Beach. Kids in attendance included Jaya (and new baby Turner), Cora, Vianne (and one-year-old baby Shae), Anika, Eli, Isabelle (with a baby sister nearly here) and as we were leaving, Max and Miles.

Andrew had a blast at the party. It was his first time this summer in the water, and he really enjoyed getting his feet wet. It got me excited about spending lots more time at the beach as the weeks go by.

Pictures from the party are in the gallery. For a fun comparison, see pictures from their one-year and two-year birthday parties.



**Birthday fun (2008-06-30 10:06)**



June 30: Well, yesterday was a lovely birthday. I got to sleep in a little, my sweetie made me French toast for breakfast, and we had a slow morning at home. Around noon, we went to a farm with our neighbor Nancy. Andrew had a great time seeing Alpacas, donkeys, a goat, horses, and many doggies.

Late afternoon, we met up with Joe and Becky, Michael and Lisa, Dad, and Terry, and we all headed up to Baraboo to eat dinner at one of our favorite restaurants - Ishnala. We had a huge meal, including shaum torte for dessert, and we all left stuffed. All in all, a good day. And one where I rarely thought about the fact that one year ago was when Mom was first getting some negative health diagnoses. Nope. Hardly thought about it at all.

Pictures from our day are in the gallery.

## 4.7 July

Why, Mommy, why? Why? (2008-07-05 08:13)



July 5: About a week before his third birthday, Andrew dove into the world of "why?" I'd been awaiting the "why" stage with some degree of excitement and anticipation. I had been thinking of creative answers for an inquiring mind. However, I was a bit surprised to find that about 6 hours into the land of "why" that I was tired out and feeling kind of done. It's exhausting!

Here's an example:

Andrew: Where are we, Mommy?

Me: We're driving on the highway.

Andrew: What? What did you say?

Me: We are driving on Highway 51.

Andrew: What?

Me: HIGHWAY 51

Andrew: Why?

Me: Because it's how we get home.  
Andrew: Why?  
Me: Because we need to go home so we can play with your toys.  
Andrew: What are we going to be on next?  
Me: Well, in a little bit, we're going to turn onto Cottage Grove Road.  
Andrew: WHAT? What did you say? I didn't hear you. What did you say.  
Me: Cottage Grove Road. That's the name of the road. Can you say that?  
Andrew: Cottage Gwrove Woad. Are we there yet? Are we there yet?  
Me: You'll know where turning onto Cottage Grove Road when we go around a big circle.  
Andrew: Are we there yet?  
Me: It'll be in a few minutes. It's about a mile up the road.  
Andrew: What? What did you say?  
Me: Almost  
Andrew: The Big Circle!!! Where are we now. Mommy, Mommy, Mommy. Where are we?  
Me: The exit ramp. We're about to get onto Cottage Grove Road.  
Andrew: What? Why? Why Mommy, why?

Wow. Makes me kind of tired to recall! How do kids have so much energy? Inquiring minds want to know:)

#### Fourth of July reunion (2008-07-05 08:20)



July 5: We had a great Fourth of July at my mom's Aunt Carol and Uncle Bill's home on a lake in Oconomowoc. It was

a lot of fun to see cousins and aunts and uncles, and we had a really fun time splashing around in the water. It was Sylvie's first time in non-bathtub water, and she was happily dipping her legs in (sometimes going up to her neck) for almost an hour.

Andrew got to go for a ride on the pontoon boat, and then he had fun floating and getting thrown high into the air by his strong Uncle Bubba.

Pictures from the reunion (mostly taken by Joe) are in the gallery.

### Outdoor fun (2008-07-09 07:22)



July 9: The last week has been a good one. We enjoyed our long weekend, and the last couple days have included lots of visiting with friends. That always makes for some good times! On Friday Joe, Sylvia, and I went for a walk on Picnic Point. To our amazement, we saw three baby mink in the water and very close to us along the shore. The next day, we went back with Michael, Becky, and Andrew. We had a lovely time, but we didn't get a second viewing of the mink.

Pictures from the last days are in the gallery.

Oh, and last week we had doctor's appointments for both kids. Andrew is 32 pounds and 3' 1.75" tall (that's around the 50th percentile for both). Sylvia is 14 pounds, 4 ounces and 25" long (also around the 50th percentile) [not 16" as previously noted!]. I've got two happy, growing kids!

This morning we're having some friends over this morning for a toddler art group. We have colored water, eye droppers, and coffee filters. Should be fun!



### **Tom is in the hospital (2008-07-09 07:36)**

July 9:

5:00pm: Tom has been doing alright today. Joe and Michael have been staying with him at the University Hospital's ICU. Joe said that while Tom is mostly unconscious, he has been able to communicate, nod, and indicate that he needs more pain meds. He still has a breathing tube, and they expect to keep it in for another day or two. At this point, the main concerns are the high risk of internal infection and the unknown whether the surgery was successful. The next five to seven days will tell. If all goes well, he'll be getting better. If there is an infection or a problem with the surgical site, the problem should manifest itself in that time. That's the update for now!

9am: We got some bad news last night. Our family friend, Tom, is in the hospital after having emergency surgery for a bowel obstruction. He was in surgery last evening for four or five hours. Michael and Joe were at the hospital and saw him in the ICU. He's on a ventilator and under close observation. If all goes well, he should come out of ICU in four or five days. Really serious stuff. Michael was going back to the hospital this morning. I don't think I'm going to be able to visit much until he gets out of ICU since I don't think I can take the kids there. Tom's family is out of state, and Terry is in Oregon visiting his family this month.

Poor Tom. It's a tough time.

### **Kid party at our house (2008-07-10 08:57)**



July 10: We had four friends over yesterday morning, and we had a great time! We made flowers out of coffee filters, the kids ran about and had a blast, and we all enjoyed each other's company. Pictures of the morning are in the gallery.

### **Tom's improving (2008-07-11 13:54)**

July 11:

8:30pm: While Michael and Joe watched Andrew and Sylvia, I headed over to the University Hospital to visit Tom. He seemed amazingly well considering the surgery he went through just a couple days ago. His throat is really sore, so he is whispering, but he was talking and joking and seemed really "with it" for someone on a substantial amount of morphine! He'd been up walking several times, but he's also prone to moments of utter exhaustion. The doctor stopped by while I was there, and they are planning on moving him out of the ICU and to a normal hospital room tomorrow.

By the by, I've never been in an ICU before. Good grief. Just walking down the hall...there are some really hurt people there. Uhh...I can't imagine. It's a really serious place. Sort of made me want to run far, far away to a place of peace. Also sort of made me want to go immediately to medical school so I can help people there too.

3pm: The news from my brothers is that as of last night, Tom is sitting up in a chair, off the ventilator (while still on a heavy-duty air mask), and able to communicate. He may be moving out of the ICU in the next day. Still a long road to recovery, and he's not out of the woods yet in terms of infections and surgery success, but we're on the right track. Way to go, Tom!

### **Beach bums (2008-07-11 14:01)**



July 11: I am so happy staying at home with the kids! Especially when I spend the day at the beach with my buddies! I hope to make this a regular event!:) Pictures from our hours on the beach (much of which Andrew spent climbing



trees!) are in the gallery.

### **Tom is doing well (2008-07-12 19:23)**

July 12: Sylvia and I went to the hospital to visit Tom today. He was moved from the ICU to a normal hospital room, and he seemed to be doing really well. He'd taken a couple walks and he had a very steady stream of visitors. I was impressed at how strongly he could hold and move Sylvie. She was quite interested in grabbing at his tubes! Tom's voice is still pretty soft, so it's a little hard to hear him in the video. A transcription of the video clip is below.

Tom: This is my friend Sylvia. And I'm doing very well. I love Sylvia and she loves me, right! That's probably why I'm doing so well.

Ed: cough cough (in the background)

Tom: Oi oi oi oi oi. OK, now watch as Sylvia bites my finger off.

Ed: cough cough

Althea: Open up, honey! Tom's looking good.

### **Where do I end and you begin? (2008-07-14 07:53)**



July 14: The other day, Andrew was curled up in my lap with his arms intertwined amongst mine. I was looking down at our hands and surprised myself by thinking for a moment that his hand was mine. Then I chuckled (because really, his fingers are a lot smaller than mine), but it made me think.

When Andrew was little, my mom told me that when she was a new mom, one of the things she had to work at the most was understanding that she and her baby were independent people. She said that she always felt like she and her children were one, and that the whole of raising her kids was a constant peeling apart of our united selves.

So from the time they were born, and perhaps for the rest of our lives, Andrew and Sylvia will be learning to be their own, independent persons and Bryan and I will be learning how much to protect and how much to trust, how much to nurture and how much to encourage fledging.

Sylvie is still so new.

The other day, I left her with my brothers while I went to see Tom in the hospital. When I returned, Sylvie was so very, very sad. She saw me, and I could see relief in her tear-filled eyes. When I held her, she gently stroked my lips with her finger tips...reassuring herself that I was there.

To me, it seemed like our separation wasn't so much about missing me as about feeling perhaps adrift without my presence. It made me think, "I don't think she knows that we are two different people!" Having access to her mama is one of the constants in her world, and the few times that I've left her, I think she's more upset by the gap I leave than anything.

So that's some musings for the morning. Andrew's been very patient and waited to swing on his swing until I finished. So now, I'm off!

**First trip to the dentist (2008-07-16 14:01)**



July 16: Yesterday, Andrew had his first dentist appointment. We'd been practicing at home to get him ready. I'd be the dentist, and he'd be the patient. I'd call his name and then lead him back to a chair which I'd pretend made lots of noise and lifted him up and down and back. Then I put some baby spoons on a plate and use them to count his teeth. Then I took out my power toothbrush and used it to polish his teeth.

Andrew was pretty jazzed about his first big dentist appointment, and he did a marvelous job. They even actually scraped his teeth and flossed. He looked so little sitting in the big dentist's chair with his feet coming down to the middle of the chair! The hygienist has a three-year-old, and she was really nice. It was one of those heart-fluttering experiences, watching Andrew follow their instructions, talking to the dentist, and doing just what they asked. I'm so very proud of that little man.

Our day (2008-07-16 14:20)



July 16: It's hot today. Nearly 90 degrees. I currently have the ice cream maker cranking away on a new batch of cake batter ice cream. Yum. I have some iced coffee concentrate brewing on the counter. I am considering starting a batch of some amazing-looking chocolate sorbet that I saw today.

"How is this possible?" you may wonder, when I have two small, quite needy children right here. The secret:

Andrew is napping. It hasn't happened in weeks. But here he is, napping for over an hour. And Sylvia isn't napping, but she's content. And pretty hot. And she DID NOT want me to read books to her. And she DOES NOT want to lie down in her crib. But she is pretty happy sitting in her seat next to me as I cook (and now as I post), so that's a nice thing.

We spent the morning at Jessica's house. They are moving in a mere two weeks (just a mile or two from us), and so I went over with the idea of helping her pack or helping watch her kids while she packed. Silly notions:) She did get a closet and dresser packed, but four kids is a lot of kids. And we left the house looking like it was pummeled by a fierce storm. Oh well! We all had fun.

Photos may be forthcoming. (11:45pm update: Here they are!)

### Sylvia these days (2008-07-16 14:44)



July 16: Sylvia is five months old now. Hard to believe! Andrew was five months old around Thanksgiving of '05. I still think that they look a lot like each other.

So here's a snapshot of some of the cute things that our little girl is up to these days.

- She's smiling. A LOT. With her big gummy grin.
- She's rolling...mostly from back to front. But she's very good at it.
- She loves to fall asleep by rubbing a soft blanket on her face. And sucking on her paci.
- She wakes up two to three times a night. Sometimes more...and that's no fun. Sometimes just twice. She goes to bed around 8 and usually wakes at 12, 2, 4, and then 6 am starts the day.
- Around the end of June (so when she was about 4 1/2 months), she stopped crying/singing when in her car seat. It was around the time she was getting better at grasping toys. The difference in my life has been notable. Going places is so much less stressful! Now crying in the car is not nearly so common.
- She's also been doing great in the bike trailer. We've done several rides in the last week, and the only time she really got crying was when Big Brother bit her finger. Not sure what he was thinking there...it didn't seem to be

maliciously intended. She started screaming so I stopped the bike and went to pick her up, wondering if the sun got in her eyes or if her tummy hurt her, and Andrew said cheerfully, "I bit her, Mommy!" Sure enough...teeth marks on her finger. Anyway, that's another story.

- When Sylvia is on her tummy, she often pushes up with her arms so she can get a good look around the room. It's a really cute pose.
- She's also working on sitting up. She can reach out in front or to the side to balance herself (sometimes), but she needs someone ready to catch her at all times!
- Sylvia thus far is not so in to books. She does like faces, and she's been reacting strongly to the books I just got her with photos of baby faces. However, the reaction is fiercely screeching.
- Over the weekend, she started adding the "D" sound into her vocabulary. She does a lot of "aahhh" and "ooohhhh" "ooooo" "ggaaaahhh" "gooooo" normally, but "daaahhhh" and "doooo" and "ah da ah da" is new. She say it a lot. Especially AH DAH.
- She's got a great laugh. And she laughs most of all for her beloved brother. He can make her laugh in a second. My assessment is that she's over the moon about him. And he about her. And he's working on being gentle. Babies are so cute, sometimes it's hard not to want to pinch and squeeze and nibble upon them. At least I think so!

A

### Preparedness pays off (2008-07-17 08:47)



July 17: Some people like to be prepared in case there is a natural disaster. I like to be prepared for any kind of emergency baking situations. My kitchen is stocked with almond paste, sweetened condensed milk, tapioca, many



kinds of flour, dutch process cocoa, etc. One never knows when a baking need will arise and one will need to whip out a dessert at a moment's notice. No running to the store for me! When we moved from our house in Ann Arbor, I had about eight packages of butter in the fridge. Running out of baking staples is, I believe, a subconscious fear of mine. But today that preparedness paid off. I strapped Sylvia to me in her ergo carrier, chopped up chocolate, and quickly made The Smitten Kitchen's Chocolate Sorbet. It's currently cooling in the fridge. Mmmm. I love chocolate. And ice cream.

### **My two kids (2008-07-18 08:15)**

July 18: Aren't they both adorable? Here are pictures of Andrew and Sylvia at a bit over five months.





**Chocolate face (2008-07-18 08:24)**



July 18: So the chocolate sorbet that I made yesterday is rather good. Like lick the bowl good. I gave Andrew (my boy who likes to eat batter) the bowl and a spoon, and this is what happened. Oh my.

Just note that if I had turned the camera around, my face may or may not have looked similar. I truly love Andrew gusto for life.

In other news, as I wrote this post, I said, "That's my big guy!" and he replied, "I'm not big. I'm still quite yiddle."

## The second half of summer is nigh (2008-07-21 10:50)



July 21: I can't believe that we've already reached late July. Oh, sweet summer. Slow down, slow down! The days fly by on fleet feet. So far, our July has been remarkably unscheduled. We had three weekends in a row with almost no pre-planned activities. But now, all that changes. Here's a quick snapshot:

- Bryan's mom is flying up here tomorrow and will be taking Andrew down to Texas for his first solo visit. Bryan, Sylvia, and I are following this weekend and will be coming back up with him next week.
- Our annual weekend at Jack's house is the first weekend in August this year.
- The second weekend in August, Sylvia and I are flying to Vermont for my friend Jennifer's wedding. Jennifer and I went to graduate school together. Grace and I will be meeting up there and rooming together.
- The third weekend in August I'm home and unscheduled.
- The fourth weekend in August, I fly with the two kids to Washington DC to visit Grace, Tim & John; Heather, Michael, & Evelyn; and Kacy & Reuteger. Kacy's wedding is on August 30. I'll spend a week hanging out with folks in DC (my new stay-at-home role allows for such lollygagging!), and then Bryan is joining me for the wedding. I'm really looking forward to it!

We may be heading to Ann Arbor for a visit in September too, so that's our late summer travel excitement. It all should be a lot of fun:)

### **Tom's recuperating at home (2008-07-21 11:22)**

July 21: I haven't done an update on Tom in a while, but no news is good news. He's back at home recovering and doing pretty well. Sleep does wonderful for healing. I hope he recovers from this surgery as handily as Mom recovered from her Whipple procedure in January 2006. They seem to be somewhat similar in terms of being major gastro-intestinal surgeries!

### **And he's off! (2008-07-23 12:52)**



July 23: An hour ago, Andrew and Granny flew away on what is Andrew's first trip without his parents. He's heading to Texas to spend the next few days at Granny and Grandad's house. Sylvia, Bryan, and I will be joining him on Saturday.

Andrew was excited beyond words. All morning long he wanted to go to the airport. I'm excited too! It's fabulous that he can be spreading his wings and having one-on-one fun with his grandparents. And I'll get to focus on Sylvia for a few days. Focus on Sylvia and (hopefully) find a little extra space in my life to breathe.

Now I can turn to my five-month-old and ask, "Darling, what would you like to do this afternoon?"



**She cut a tooth!** (2008-07-23 15:15)



July 23: Sylvia's been working the teething thing a lot recently...chomping hard on knuckles and about anything else she can get in her mouth. Last night I thought I could see the white of a tooth just under the skin, and this afternoon, it appears to have cut through!

Oh dear, my baby is soon to have a toothy smile instead of a gummy grin. I'll need to get some good final gum shots of her before that tooth pushes up and becomes visible!

Way to go, Sylvia!



## Happenings this past week (2008-07-24 07:38)



July 24: I got photos downloaded off my camera yesterday afternoon (post-Andrew departure), and it reminded me of all the fun things we've had the chance to do this last week. I really like this staying at home gig. It provides lots of opportunities to spend time with my kids and people I love and for us to do all sorts of fun things. And the weather! It's been gorgeous!

Pictures of our galavanting adventures are in the gallery.

Last Friday, we went to the County Fair with Uncle Bubba. I'd stayed home all day on Thursday, and it had driven me slightly mad. I'm just not that good at being home in the house with both kids and no activities or adult interactions all day. Nope. So Friday afternoon, Uncle Bubba rescued me from myself by meeting us at the fair. We walked through all the barns and saw large numbers of animals. It was kind of amazing to see how much Andrew has grown and matured. He was intrigued by the animals, ran up to try to pet them, and even let a woman pick him up and put him in the pen with a couple huge pigs. Last year, he was fascinated but very hesitant and the year before he was interested but rather terrified. He's really growing up!

On Sunday, I helped co-host a baby shower for Sarah. Her mom and sister and neice drove up from Chicago, and we all had a really fun time. Andrew loved eating the M & M's. We drew pictures on onesies and chatted away the afternoon. Sarah's due in late August/early Sept., and it's a lot of fun to anticipate the arrival of the wee one.

The night before we had gone to a baby-welcoming party for another Sarah (Wyatt's mom). Her baby is due (via c-section) tomorrow! She's looking so great and strong...it's going to be fun to see Wyatt as a big brother very soon.

Sunday evening, Andrew went to a Mallards baseball game with Bryan and my dad. It was my dad's birthday present to the little guy. Andrew had an absolute blast. He came home nearly vibrating with excitement and spilling over with tales of jumping in the big blow-up duck, playing in the sandbox, and eating popcorn, a hotdog, and potato

chips. Oh, yea, they also watched a few innings of the game:)

✘ On Tuesday, Jessica, Eli, and Celia came over and we all enjoyed a fabulous summer day together. While Jessica was point person of the 4 (four) kids, I headed up a craft project of dying play silks with kool-aid. Years before having kids, I was really, really wanting to fill my life with colorful play silks. But for \$11 each, I just haven't been able to justify it. So I was pretty excited when I found that you can get silks for \$2.50 each and dye them with a few packets of Kool-aid! We made 16 silks. The boys even helped with some of the stirring and dye-packet-dumping. I now dance around the house just like these kids.

So it's been a good week! Happy summer!

### Summer evenings in Madison (2008-07-25 08:29)



July 25: I just love this time of year. In the past I haven't been as big of a fan of summer. Fall and spring were my favorite seasons. And maybe they still are...but right now I can think of no time I'd rather have it be than late summer. The fireflies are lighting up our yard with their dances each night. I made avocado ice cream last night from The Perfect Scoop. Bryan and I took a walk with Sylvia before dinner, and we talked and pushed her in a stroller, and it was so peaceful. I'm really enjoying this one-child vacation!

On Wednesday night, we attended our first Concert on the Square this summer. It was a soft and mild summer evening, and the light was great so I took lots of photos. Bryan and I have been filling our evenings recently re-watching Band of Brothers. Last night, we watched the last three episodes. What a great show.

Sylvia is squealing and spinning in her exersaucer. She's improving her sitting skills by the hour. It's a lot of fun to get

to focus just on her for a bit here. But I think she misses the excitement of her fabulous big brother:)  
Off to Texas tomorrow morning! Word from the grandparents is that he is having a tremendous time. What a lucky kid:)

### Babies Everywhere! (2008-07-30 19:40)



July 30: We got home from a great vacation in Texas visiting Bryan's family (more on that in an upcoming post), and when I checked my email this morning, I had notes from three (3) (III) friends who had babies! Holy smokes! Add in a baby born earlier this month and two (2) (II) friends who've told me in the past couple weeks that they are expecting babies, and we're having a baby fiesta here this July! And three more friends are expecting babies in August!

So which babies were born?

Wyatt, Andrew's little friend, has a new little brother - Clay Oliver. He was born on Friday, July 25, and the word is that he's doing really well. He was 7 lbs, 5 oz and 20 inches. Sarah and Steve are now parents of two:) Sarah had a planned c-section since Clay was breach, and she had some medical complications afterwards, but now all is well, and we're really glad we live with 21st century medicine.





Lucy is another mom in my Happy Bambino group. Her daughter, Isobel, is a big sister now that little Suvi Jane has made her appearance. Lucy was 10 days over due, and her labor culminated in an emergency c-section, but all is well, and it sounds like Suvi is a pretty mellow little person. She was born 9 lbs, 11 oz! What a cutie!



My friend Liz from Michigan also had a baby in the last several days. Her little boy, Zachary, was born a couple weeks early. Liz and I went to Botswana together in 1997. Her little guy was 6 lbs, 4 oz. and 21 inches.



Bryan's high school friend, Mark, and his wife Brytt had a baby girl, Sutton Eileen, on July 9. She weighed in at 7 lbs, 10 oz, and is 20 inches long. Congratulations all!

As if that wasn't enough, one of my favorite blogs, The Pioneer Woman, has gone baby-crazy because her sister had a baby boy.

✕ And babies on the way? Well, one is not-yet public so I can't yet say. The other is long anticipated makes me so very happy. Julie and Jerry have had a really rough last 15 months. They had two miscarriages, but as of today, they are 10 weeks along with a much-desired pregnancy. Julie has been posting updates on her website. Grayson should be a big brother in February!

In the next month or so, my friends Sarah, Jen, and Mandee are all heading toward delivery. Babies Everywhere!

### **She's cutting her second tooth (2008-07-30 19:50)**

July 30: Ouch! Teething just doesn't seem like a fun activity. Sylvie cut her second tooth (bottom left) yesterday while we were flying home from Texas. She's generally in good spirits, but she's having a hard time sleeping, and I've

been keeping her dosed up on Tylenol these past days to ensure a somewhat happy girl. I'm appreciating these last days of her sweet, toothless grin.

## 4.8 August

**Searching for my marbles amidst the dust bunnies (2008-08-01 11:00)**



August 1: Were Sylvia not at this moment waking from her nap, I would write a post about how nuts my kids are making me this morning. More on that another time.

OK, I'm back. I love my children. I really, really do. And I feel so lucky to be their mama. But there are moments when I find myself plotting out an escape route. Like I was seriously thinking of hiding from them in the back yard for a bit this morning. But what I really wanted to do was to get on my computer to figure out why my website's gallery wasn't working after some tweaks I tried on it recently. [Aside: is my gallery running slowly for you? I "upgraded" it in December, and since then it seems like it might actually be slower. Let me know] Anyway, I was just wanting to check my email and fix my gallery problems.

But instead, I decided to take Andrew to a park in Monona to meet some of the kids he's going to go to preschool with. However, he adamantly refused. He "never wants to go anywhere EVER." Instead he'd prefer to kiss Sylvie lots until it's too rough, snuggle with her until he's on top of her and squashing her, and shake/kiss her hands until it gets violent. I think he's like me when I hold a little bunny. I sometimes think "It's so CUTE. I must squish it." Weird, I know, but it's true.



When he's not love-mauling his sister, he's either crying or wanting to be doing something new or being totally adorable. It's been exhausting.

For example, just now he started banging our floor lamp into the wall.

"STOP, please, Andrew!" I say.

"Why?" says Andrew.

"Because that might put a dent in the wall or break the lamp," I say.

"What dent?" says Andrew.

"The Lamp Might Dent the Wall," I say.

"Why?" says Andrew as he walks away.

Then as I typed that, he went to the other room and came back with a finger painting he did this morning.

"Oh," I say, "that's your pretty finger painting."

Andrew lays it down by my feet.

"Oooo. It's really wet still, let's put it back on the table so it can dry."

"WHHHHHYYYY?" asks Andrew as he takes it away.

"So it doesn't get all over everything," I call as he disappears around the corner.

As I typed that, Andrew came in the room with his new bug net and repeatedly "caught me" by plopping it over my head. Oh, and Sylvie is nursing/typing/fussing/grinning. She isn't having a great day. Wait, I take that back. If I hold her and focus on her, she's fine. She's just teething and not feeling like life is OK if she's been set down.

So we leave for Jack's house this afternoon, and I'm looking forward to getting out of the house!!!

### What a lovely time we had in Texas (2008-08-01 11:54)



August 1: We're off to Jack's house today, but before we go, I really need to do at least a quick post to say what a great visit we had to Texas. Andrew's solo time went super-smoothly, and when we flew in, he didn't even want to come to the airport...he was busy washing the car with Grandad. So I think he's ready to do trips to Texas whenever we can make it work. It was such a great vacation for me...I'd love to send him down there monthly if it weren't for the airfare issue!

Ben and Melanie drove down to College Station for the weekend, and we all just had a splendid time together. I think we would have happily stayed for another week or so. We went to a local pool one day, and Andrew had a lot of fun hanging on to a "noodle" and kicking. It was one of his first times where he was really kicking and controlling himself in the water. I could do that every day! OK, Sylvie has had it with me not holding her. Photos from our vacation are in the gallery!

### Look-no-farther-chocolate ice cream (2008-08-04 07:11)

August 4: We're back from Jack's house, and it was lovely lovely! Amazing weather, fun games, delicious food (more on that soon), Sylvie's first ride down the Wisconsin River, campfire, prairie hike, frisbee, wet campers, and great company. I made chocolate ice cream for Sunday evening. It was...really good. So to ensure that others can enjoy the creamy chocolaty-ness, (and so I can find the recipe after I return the book to the library) I'll share the recipe here.

Chocolate Ice Cream

From: The Perfect Scoop by David Lebovitz

(by the way, I've made three ice creams from this book - chocolate gelato and avocado too - and they've all been

amazing)

2 cups heavy cream  
3 tablespoons unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder  
5 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped (I used bittersweet)  
1 cup whole milk  
3/4 cup sugar  
Pinch of salt  
5 large egg yolks  
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

Warm 1 cup of the cream with the cocoa powder in a medium saucepan, whisking to thoroughly blend the cocoa. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer at a very low boil for 30 seconds, whisking constantly. Remove from the heat and add the chopped chocolate, stirring until smooth. Then stir in the remaining 1 cup cream. Pour the mixture into a large bowl, scraping the saucepan as thoroughly as possible, and set a mesh strainer on top of the bowl.

Warm the milk, sugar, and salt in the same saucepan. In a separate medium bowl, whisk together the egg yolks. Slowly pour the warm milk into the egg yolk, whisking constantly, then scrape the warmed egg yolks back into the saucepan.

Stir the mixture constantly over medium heat with a heatproof spatula, scraping the bottom as you stir, until the mixture thickens and coats the spatula (note from Althea: really do stir and scrape constantly...I ended up with some cooked eggs on the bottom of the pan). Pour the custard through the strainer and stir it into the chocolate mixture until smooth, then stir in the vanilla. Stir until cool over an ice bath.

Chill the mixture thoroughly in the refrigerator, then freeze it in your ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions. (If the cold mixture is too thick to pour into your machine, whisk it vigorously to thin it out.) (note from Althea: I made a double batch which worked fine until I tried to freeze the second half in the ice cream maker. The ice cream maker didn't have enough cold left to successfully churn the second half, so it was more goopy than churned. Yet somehow, it was still delicious, and no one complained!)

### **Safe home; home sick (2008-08-12 08:41)**

Aug. 12: Sylvia and I returned home from Vermont late (1am) last night. We had a wonderful time at my friend Jennifer's wedding. Grace and I spent a fun few days together, and Sylvie did an absolutely fabulous job being a cute kid. She turned six months old yesterday!

Andrew came down with a coughy, snortily cold while we were gone, and Sylvie and I both woke up this morning feeling rather cruddy. My throat feels like sand paper, and I feel achy and like I could crawl in bed and sleep for about four hours. Oh well.

I took about 400 pictures at Jennifer and Do's wedding. And I still have pictures from Jack's to post. Soon, soon! We're home for the next two weeks, and then on the 23rd Andrew and Sylvie and I fly to DC. Good to be home for a while:)

### **A moment by myself (2008-08-14 16:48)**

Aug. 14: My husband is so sweet. Thanks to him, this post is coming to you live from JavaCat. I'm playing with pictures from Jennifer's wedding on my computer and sipping on a frappe. And unless my cell phone rings, I have no one needing me right now. It's absolute bliss.

We're all recovering from our adventures with virus. Andrew has a runny nose and a bit of a cough, but for the most part, he seems back to himself. Sylvie is crankier than normal and has an occasional really rattly cough. On Tuesday, we watched about five hours of PBS and movies. All I wanted to do was sleep and all Sylvia wanted to do was be held and bounced. Yesterday afternoon I showered and got dressed and felt much better. Joe came over in the evening and we hung out and watched the Olympics together. He had the same cold, so we could spend time with him without worrying about transmitting...that already happened last week!

Then today I attempted to take part in a conference call for Carleton's Alumni Adventures. It didn't go well. We went to lunch with Gathering Waters to celebrate Joe's last day there. And I was adventurous and took the kids to Woodman's to stock up on food. By 3pm, I was more than ready to crash. CRASH. But the kids were not. We limped through until 6 when Bryan came home. He walked in the door and said, "Get thee somewhere else!" I'm almost never not with Sylvia, and it's pretty nice to spend an hour without her company:)

So that's what's happening in our world. Our illness is on the mend. I'm loving watching the Olympics. On Tuesday, Bryan brought me home sherbet, Dove bars, and a Glamor magazine. What a wonderful guy. It's kind of fun to get pampered when a person isn't feeling well. Or when a person is feeling well!

I took about 400 pictures at Jennifer's wedding, so I'm going to return to my post-processing.

xoxo

Althea

### **Commenting on my website (2008-08-14 16:55)**

Aug. 14: I love when I get comments on my website. It's like a hug or a piece of chocolate or a nice piece of mail. And it makes me smile. Unfortunately, my comments have recently been targeted by spam. LOTS of spam. Like dozens every day. I've tried to find a new security system to use, but I haven't been successful. So I now have it set up so I have to approve comments before they are posted. And I delete oodles of spam each time I log on. It's really annoying.

But it's less annoying when I have some real comments in there (thanks Lisa, Sarah, Karen, and Julie!). So if you're considering commenting, please do. It'll make me smile.

### **Anniversary (2008-08-14 19:10)**

Aug. 14: Just for the record, Tuesday (the 12th) was Mom and Dad's wedding anniversary. Their 36th. Last year Mom said they went to a park and sat on a bench near the water together. I'm so sorry, Dad, that you had to

spend your anniversary without your wife. Last year this week, things were getting pretty bad...August 17, 2007 post.

**Picture catch-up (2008-08-14 19:17)**



Aug. 14: Boy am I behind on posting pictures! I just added captions to the pictures I took when we went to Texas in late July. Here they are!

A couple fun things that happened in Texas: the kids took their first bath together, Sylvia had her first solid food, we went swimming at a nearby pool (SO FUN!), we played charades and poker, we ate lots of yummy food, we mostly stayed cool indoors but ventured out for a walk and some backyard splashing, and we basked in our time together.

I've also uploaded pictures from the last couple weeks and some pictures from an art group we did in late July.

**Do these kids look familiar?** (2008-08-14 19:25)



Aug. 14: When I was at Bryan's parent's house, I took pictures of some of the pictures of Melanie when she was little. I think she looks a lot like Sylvia. You be the judge. Do Andrew and Sylvia not look a whole lot like little Bryan and Melanie? See the pics here!

**When you need a laugh...** (2008-08-14 21:12)

Aug. 14: Sylvia has a delicious laugh. And her big brother has the magic key to unleash the giggles. Here's a video that's sure to make you smile.

[EMBED]



**Jack's house re-cap (2008-08-15 15:37)**



Aug. 15: Two weeks ago, we had a wonderful time at our annual pilgrimage to Jack's house near the Wisconsin River in southwest Wisconsin. We had 12 adults attending this year. Maretta and Kyle couldn't make it because Kyle's sister Pam got married that Saturday. Tom was able to come...he's doing really well post-surgery. Michael's friends Matt, Josh, and Betsy also joined us. Lisa stayed home this year, but Becky came. So we had a full house. Pictures of our weekend are in the gallery.

Joe and I did the menu planning early in the week. Then Michael, Joe, Matt, Sylvie, Andrew, and I went grocery shopping on Thursday (eating is, after all, one of the major activities of the weekend). We stayed pretty traditional with the menu, only adding home made chocolate ice cream as a new dessert item on Saturday night.

We all converged on Jack's house on Friday evening. Sylvia and I rode in Terry's car, and for the first time, Sylvia did not cry most of the drive to Jack's house (this is her third time to Woodman). Thank heavens! We all tried out the Harry Potter-esque Jelly Bellies, which were disgusting, played night frisbee, played some games, and went for a late-night walk down to the boat launch - the stars were absolutely amazing.

On Saturday morning, for the first time in memory, we all got organized pretty quickly. We ate breakfast on the patio, got the canoe out (so I could go along with Sylvia), and drove upstream to Bergum Bottoms to put in. Tom stayed back at the ranch, but the rest of us floated down the Wisconsin River for a few miles, stopping to crack open a watermelon and hang out on a couple sandbars. Andrew had a blast, and Sylvia (for the most part) did really well.

After the mid-river gorge (which we noted involved somewhat less gorging than normal), Jack, Bryan, Joe, Michael, and Matt re-did the float down the river again. Meanwhile, Josh did dishes and Becky and I prepared the Jambalaya, corn bread, ice cream, and bread. The evening was filled with game playing (the fogies beat the youngsters soundly at Trivial Pursuit).

On Sunday, Jack took Terry, Matt, and myself on a hike up to see his prairie. He's been working to restore the pasture to native prairie plants for the last 10 years. Jack's recently received several grants to help (a tiny bit) with the restoration work, and he's put tremendous numbers of hours in to his restoration work. It shows. The prairie is beautiful.

We left Sunday afternoon, wishing the weekend was longer. At least I have pictures to remind me of the lovely times!

#### **I need my sister to live with me (2008-08-15 18:48)**



Aug. 15: I'm doing a huge amount of posting these last days. I'd like to dole it out more evenly, but that's not how my life works:)

On Sunday, August 3, Mareta drove down from St. Paul to spend the week with us. She stayed at our house, and we spent a lovely, full week together. I'm so appreciative that she sacrificed a week away from her new husband to

play with us. And just so you know, she has scored a job at Penumbra Theater company working on costumes for the show Fences.

I've decided that my life would be notably calmer, happier, and more fun if an adult whom I love and who has no kids could hang out with me at least 12 hours a day. No Kidding. Having Maretta around was awesome. And that's just from a child care and mental health perspective.

Maretta and I went down to Janesville to visit Mum early in the week. Speaking of Mum, I got a call from Debbie, one of her friends, the other day that she had fallen and Debbie had taken her to the hospital. Another friend was spending the night with her. X-rays showed that she hadn't broken anything. Debbie's increased the assistance she's receiving at her assisted living home.

Maretta and I spent a couple days clearing out her room at Dad's house. It's a small room, but there was a lot in there! We packed up four garbage bags to take to Good Will and filled the minivan with things for her to take back to St. Paul.

We didn't end up getting to go shopping together...that's one thing I really like doing with my sister...but we had lots of other good times. We got together with Michael and Joe for lunch - one of the first times I can remember that the four of us kids have been together sans significant others or parents. Andrew and Sylvia were hangers-on. Maretta, Sylvia, and I had dinner with Terry. I think he liked going out with his three girls. Then on Friday night, Maretta, Bryan, and I had a get-together with Terry, Dad, Becky, and Joe to watch the opening of the Olympics. We ordered Chinese food, and I made peach shaum torte and peach ice cream. Good stuff!

I was sad to see Maretta go on Saturday, but I'm so glad we got to spend a whole unstructured week together. Now that she really, truly lives in a different state, I appreciate these times we spend together even more.

PS. LuAnn or Melanie, if you're reading this, "sister" can be replaced by "mother" or "sister" if you're interested!

## I love weddings! (2008-08-16 17:16)



Aug. 16: Grace and I had a great time in Vermont at Jennifer's wedding. Vermont is such a beautiful place. I was there several years ago with Wes and Sarah. This was a very short visit, but it reinforced my opinion that I would get along very well living in Burlington.

Pictures from the wedding are now in the gallery.

Grace and I met on Friday late afternoon at the Burlington airport. We met up with Jennifer and her friends and family at a park on Lake Champlain for supper. We were all staying at the same hotel, and our room was a nice suite, so after putting Sylvia down for bed, Lara, Reid, and Jennifer came over to watch the Olympics and hang out.

On Saturday morning, we met up with Jennifer, bridesmaids Amanda and Lara, and Do's sister to watch Jennifer get her hair coiffed. Afterwards we ate breakfast at a delicious creperie called The Skinny Pancake. Thumbs up for nutella and strawberries on crepes! The wedding was at 2:30, so we headed back to the hotel to get dressed and then drove about a half hour south of Burlington to the beautiful park where the wedding was held. I had fun taking pictures as the wedding party got ready. Thunder rumbled in the distance as the wedding began...and about 10 minutes into the ceremony, the thunder and lightning got close enough - everyone headed to the backup indoor location.

I thought it was pretty cool that while having a wedding rained out mid-ceremony could be a worst-case scenario, in this case everyone was calm and happy and it didn't seem to be a problem one bit.

After the ceremony, I took loads of pictures while a) grace took care of Sylvia b) some other interested person took care of Sylvia or c) Sylvia was happy on my back in the carrier. She did splendidly for the whole trip.

On Sunday, Grace and I met up with the bride, groom, and bridesmaids for a breakfast at the Penny Cluse Cafe. Again, VERY good. Afterwards, Grace and I spent a couple hours wandering around the Church Street Marketplace, a pedestrian mall with some really great shopping. Some of my favorite stores were Hatley, Sprout, and

a cool camping store called the Outdoor Gear Exchange. Then Grace and I took a tour of Lake Champlain Chocolates and partook of some hearty samples. We also left with chocolate to take home:) I prefer dark, Grace prefers milk chocolate.

We had a late lunch at Vermont's Culinary Resort before running back to the airport. And the whole time, Sylvia did great!

What a great trip! Grace, I hope you didn't come down with whatever I got sick with on Tuesday!

### **Thoughts this Tuesday morning (2008-08-19 07:31)**

Aug. 19: Sylvia is taking a nap. Ahh, relaxing one-child home. Andrew woke up around 5 this morning and wanted breakfast. I was dimly aware of Bryan emphatically informing Andrew that it wasn't time to be out of his bed yet. Andrew's been pretty interested in learning to tell time. He doesn't get the whole big/little hand thing, but he likes to look to see when it is snack time (10am and 4pm). Just now he looked at the clock in his room and told me that it is 9am. It's neat to watch him learn!

I've been loving watching the Olympics every night. I really, really like the Olympics. It'll be a little sad when they are over...

On Saturday, Joe and I hung out and went shopping for new shoes for him for the fall. I love spending time with my siblings:) He leaves for Bowdoin on Friday. Egad! Becky is starting school at Williams this fall in Massachusetts. I'm really proud of her...for those of you unfamiliar with small liberal arts colleges, Williams is regularly ranked #1.

Dad came over for lunch on Sunday, and we had a brat and hot-dog picnic. Dad had some fun Sylvie and Andrew time, and Andrew again requested that he be able to "go to Grandpa's house with no Mommy and no Daddy." We could drive him there "and then leave."





I went through all Sylvia's clothes on Sunday and pulled out outgrown ones and added in the six-month-sized ones. This was pretty exciting for me because a) I LOVE baby clothes and b) because my favoritest clothes that I got for Sylvie before she was born were of the 6 month variety. See her for a sample. Oh, I love baby clothes! When Marettta was in town, the two of us went through four boxes of children's clothes from Dana and my mom to identify clothes we thought we'd use. I then compiled those clothes with the bags upon bags of clothes that my friend Pam had passed on to me, the items I've received from Kathy, and the items I've purchased myself or been given as gifts. My basement shelves of children's things have now transitioned from a complete disaster to a harmonious, well-labeled piece art. (well, maybe that's overstating things slightly).

Yesterday the kids and I hung out with Jessica, Eli, and Celia for the morning. It was so nice to see them again! I think it's been almost a month! Then I braved both the post-office and Woodmans (I now have several gray hairs and wrinkles forming), and my car overheated. So it's in the shop. Terry came over for supper.

Andrew's begging for a snack. He no longer likes to eat food at meal time and is constantly asking for snacks (than he then doesn't tend to eat).

Me: "Andrew, is there anything you would like me to write for you?"

Andrew: "Nooooooo!!!" (runs away)

OK, that's it from us today! Joe and Becky are coming over to play, so we're looking forward to spending time with them!

Ta ta!



### **This makes me want to do something (2008-08-19 08:11)**

**X** Aug. 19: Bryan and I support a variety of charitable organizations. Since I was about eight, I've been giving money to environmental groups - the Natural Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Federation, the Humane Society. I've also supported animal therapy groups like Paws for a Cause. In times of crisis (9/11, Katrina), we support the Red Cross or the United Way. We support Wisconsin-based environmental groups like Gathering Waters. We give to Carleton, and when Wisconsin's ban on gay marriages was on the ballot, we gave significant donations to Fair Wisconsin. We're also starting a small endowment at the Madison Community Foundation in order to cement our family's charitable giving tradition.

But I've never been that inclined to support organizations that help people in need. I'm not sure exactly why, but it hasn't been my focus. However, after reading this article, I feel pretty moved to do something...either financial or personal...to help the women in the Congo. This article moved me profoundly. I also watched a show on PBS called A Walk to Beautiful about doctors who are helping Ethiopian women with heartbreaking childbirth injuries. I'm thinking about supporting the Fistula Foundation.

I think that being a mother of two kids makes me feel some kinship with these African woman. Living such a comfortable life, having had good labors and healthy kids makes my heart goes out to them and to want to help them with their sorrows and celebrate their strength. I want to help make life a little bit more OK for these people who could, I'm sure, be my friends...

### **Getting kinda hard core about needing naps (2008-08-21 11:53)**

Aug. 21: Sylvia is working on her second nap of the day. Which is a really good thing because I was getting desperate about having her nap. After teething and being sick, she somehow got herself to a place where she was only napping once...maybe twice in the morning for an hour or so. By the evening, she's been an exhausted mess. And even when I work all afternoon to get her to fall asleep, I really haven't been that successful.

Yesterday afternoon I went over to day-care Karen's house to help her by watching her kids for the afternoon while she moved her mom into a nursing home. Before leaving, Karen put the two little boys down for a nap. She did it by picking them up, walking them upstairs to their cribs, saying goodnight, laying them down with their pacifiers and blankets, and walking away. There was no fussing or crying. And the boys both slept for two and a half hours. It made me feel like something in my world needs to change!

Karen and I didn't always see eye to eye on child-raising techniques. She organizes the kids in a very structured way. They seem to thrive on the consistency, but I never found it practical to be all that scheduled and organized at home. Karen really wanted me to track how often I was feeding Andrew, to space out his feedings, to not nurse him to sleep, to let him cry himself back to sleep when he woke from a nap too early, to not ever skip naps because we were out, to only use the pacifier when he was sleeping, etc.

I didn't necessarily appreciate Karen's advice. I think that I was happy to work with her, but I didn't really like feeling like she was telling me how to raise my child. Especially when the advice she was giving me sometimes felt like it was designed to make her life easier at the expense of Andrew's happiness (don't hold him all the time, let him cry sometimes, don't nurse him whenever he wants...).

Karen had encouraged me to read a book called *Babywise* by Gary Ezzo, which is sort of the antithesis of attachment parenting. The goal seems to be to get your child to sleep through the night, which always seemed to me to be a sort of silly goal. My ultimate goal is to have children who feel loved and content. Who are happy and healthy and who have a strong sense that the world is a warm and loving place. If that meant waking up in the night to feed or comfort them, that's just fine with me! Dr. Sears and Dr. Brazelton are two of the attachment parenting gurus whom I most identify with. I found them both myself, and Mom later told me that they were two of the parenting resources that she also admired. Attachment parenting includes child-led breastfeeding, lots of baby-wearing, co-sleeping, and generally being very attuned to your baby's needs. It's an approach that for the most part, feels very right to me.

Now that Sylvia is six-months-old, I find myself expecting a little more out of her than I did when she was a newborn. She can self-soothe, and her needs aren't as raw as they were. In fact, "need" is shifting to "want" in a lot of cases. So I'm feeling more confident about pushing her a little to help her gain some independence.

So while I was at Karen's yesterday, I re-read the somewhat abhorred *Babywise*. And while I really, really don't like the fact that he is promoting the strict scheduling of itty-bitty babies, I did find wisdom in his suggestions of how organizing feeding time, wake time and nap time into 3-4 hour repeating segments can work well for babies and parents. So here are some things I've decided to try:

- I'm going to work to organize Sylvia's eating, wake, and nap times more. I generally just follow her cues, but the last few weeks, that hasn't been leading to good naps. Plus she's recently up for hours in the night too! So for the most part, I plan to feed her after she wakes up and then wait 2-3 hours before feeding her again. I'm also planning to not nurse her before bed to see if that helps her be able to fall back asleep better.
- I've decided (with some trepidation) to let Sylvia cry herself to sleep if necessary. I've only let her cry for about 5 minutes or maybe 10, and she's never fallen asleep...I go in after a while and nurse her down. I let her cry for both naps so far today. I set the timer for 15 minutes and gritted my teeth. The first nap she cried for about 20 minutes, but after the timer went off at 15 minutes, she sounded like she was heading toward sleep so I didn't go in. Then for this second nap, she cried for about 10 minutes. It wasn't so bad.
- I'm going to wait until she wakes up happy to go in to get her. Sylvia often wakes up crying after 45 minutes-one hour of napping. From experience with Andrew, I know that a baby who wakes crying probably wasn't ready to get up, but with Sylvia, once I go in to soothe her, she makes it very clear that she's wide awake and is not going to return to napping anytime soon. So in order to encourage longer naps, I'm going to let her cry herself back to sleep. [There's always the chance that she'll have a poopy diaper or something, so I'll have to figure out how to manage this one.] Oh, how odd...she just woke up crying. Hmmm... To check on her or not to check. It's so hard when she's calling for me and expects me to come. But she needs to sleep more. Sleep is very important for babies. Hey, she just stopped. My hope is that she'll wake up coo-ing when she wakes rested. urg. she's crying again.

So that's my plan. I'll let you know how it goes. Hopefully longer, more consistent naps will make for a happier Sylvia and a calmer Mom. Wish us luck!

#### **Last week of summer = vacation (2008-08-22 07:13)**

Aug. 22: Last night I went to American Players Theater with Jessica's family and with Terry. Both had invited me to go with them, so I picnicked with Jessica and watched the show with Terry. Bryan was home alone with the kids all

evening long (5pm until 11pm), and it sounds like they did really well. What a guy!

Andrew, Sylvia, and I are flying out to DC tomorrow to visit Heather, Michael, and Evelyn and Grace, Tim, and John. We're staying with Grace this weekend and next weekend and with Heather through the week. Next Saturday my friend Kacy is getting married, so it should be a really fun vacation and wedding! This will be my first flight solo with both kids. They're good fliers, and it's a direct flight, so I'm not particularly worried.

Bryan will be home alone for the week, and as a fun surprise, Bryan's dad was able to get tickets to come up and spend the weekend here. Bryan got Brewers tickets, and I am so very, very glad that he and his dad will have the opportunity to spend one-on-one time together. We both really wish that we lived closer to Bryan's family. I know that Bryan would love to be able to just hang out with his parents more often. So this should be a real treat.

Sylvia just woke from her morning nap. It's been about an hour. She's crying hard, and I'd like her to wake happy...indicating that she's had enough sleep and not just somehow woken up. Hmmmm. How to know whether to go get her.

Andrew and I watched some video this morning of him when he was Sylvia's age. Gosh was he cute. As he watched the video, Andrew was saying, "I love my sweet little hands! I love my cute little mouth!"

Tonight we're going to a baby shower for one of Bryan's co-workers. Should be fun! I'll be back on Sept. 2, so ta-ta until then!

### **Hey hey from DC (2008-08-25 19:00)**

Aug. 25: Greetings from Washington DC! The kids and I arrived on Saturday, and we spent a nice weekend with Grace and Tim and John. We all had a fun afternoon at the Wheaton Park playground and botanical gardens, and on Sunday, Grace and I went to a pottery studio that I have long-admired. Then today (Monday), Grace, Tim, and John drove to New York for a week-long vacation, and I took their car (thanks!) and went to stay at Heather, Michael, and Evelyn's for the week. We've got fun activities planned, but for today I just enjoyed getting to know sweet four-month baby Evie.

And now there are no more Olympics, and I am off to bed.

### **Sarah and Wes have had their baby! (2008-08-27 19:49)**

Its a boy!

Sarah and Wes welcomed little Charles Lambert Bramhall to the world on Monday, August 18, 2008, 3:23 a.m.

He weighed 7 lbs. 7 oz., measured 19.5" long, and is just as beatific and perfect as can be.

### **One year ago... (2008-08-27 19:50)**

Aug. 27: I don't even want to think about it.

### **National Zoo (2008-08-27 19:55)**

Aug. 27: It's late and I should really get myself to bed. But I'm checking up on the computer instead. We're enjoying ourselves here in DC. We spent the day hanging out with Heather and Evelyn. Took a walk again to a playground and spent the afternoon at the National Zoo whilst Heather worked. Lots of people thought I had twins (one in the Ergo and one in a stroller), and I was happy to tell them that I was helping a friend! Andrew loved seeing the Asian elephants, the pandas, a HUGE hippo, an elephant shrew, prairie dogs, and meerkats. He's animal-crazy, that kid:) I'd think of something else to say about our day, but my brain has ceased to think, so instead I'll say goodnight and head to bed. I'm sleeping with Andrew, and he's decided to sleep perpendicular to me. Fortunately he doesn't seem to kick much!

## **4.9 September**

### **We're home! (2008-09-02 17:15)**

Sept. 2: After being in Washington DC for ten days, we're all back home again. It was a positively wonderful vacation. Kacy's wedding was just beautiful. And the first anniversary of Mom's departure is behind us. I have loads of photos to download, edit, upload, and post about. Stay tuned!

### **Photos uploaded (2008-09-03 09:38)**

Sept. 3: Last night I downloaded 650 photos from my week in DC. It took a while to weed through them all, pick the best ones, put them in albums, upload them, caption them, and sort them. But it's done. And I plan to soon do several posts describing our fun times during our trip, but for those of you who would like to see some sneak-peek pics, here's the link to our DC album. Enjoy!

### **First day of preschool (2008-09-04 20:07)**

Sept. 4: Andrew donned his yellow rain boots, his bumble bee umbrella, and adorable fall clothes as he headed out the door to walk to his first day of preschool. He was pretty excited! His teachers are Sue and Emily at Monona Grove Nursery School, and I think it's going to be a delightful experience. Today we just went for 15 minutes so he could meet his teachers and explore the room. Tomorrow and Thursday and Friday next week he has shortened (2 hour) days, and then for the remainder of the school year he'll be going on Thursday and Friday mornings from 8:45 - 11:45am.

What a sweet kid! I took pictures, but tonight I've been busy

a) Watching the Republican convention and

b) Researching cars. My car started smoking this afternoon...We're contemplating replacing rather than repairing as it needs brakes and a timing belt and water pump and since it's a '92 doesn't have the same safety features that 2000+ models have.

Bon soir!

### **Off to preschool (2008-09-05 08:11)**

Sept. 5: Yesterday was Andrew's preschool orientation. He loved it. And this morning he ran around excitedly getting dressed and (amazingly) asking me to help him with his coat and shoes. Here's a quick video as we walk down the street to his school.

[EMBED]

### **Thinking back on August 31 (2008-09-05 17:40)**

Sept. 5: The first anniversary of my mom's untimely demise passed with little fanfare. I thought about calling my siblings, my dad, my mom's siblings...but what to say? "Hey, one year ago, these days were the worst of my life. And it really feels cruddy to think about. You?" So I just enjoyed my vacation in DC and thought about things occasionally and knew that many others were also thinking of things. If I'd had my computer on me, I probably would have posted something, but I didn't have my computer, so no post commemorating the anniversary was made.

However, around the time of Aug. 31, as I was thinking back on those rather horrible days last August, Andrew and I had some really sweet conversations about my mom.



While we were staying at Heather and Michael's house, Andrew found a Babler family photo and happily named off everyone. When he got done, he said, "When is Grandma not died?" Later he told me he missed her. I told him that we could call Grandpa and tell him that we are missing Grandma because he is missing Grandma too. But Andrew misunderstood me and thought I said we could call Grandma. "Let's call Grandma now!" he said. I broke the news that we couldn't call Grandma even though I really often wanted to. But I told him that we could pretend to call Grandma. "OK," he said. But as usual, he didn't want to talk. So I made a phone call to Mom. It was a little cathartic, and this is about what I said:

"Hi Mom. I miss you so very much. It's just an ache in my heart. I wish we could all see you again. Because you are a part of us all and it just doesn't feel right to not have your presence here among us. I'm really not used to the fact that you're not here. And I don't want to get used to it.

That said, we're doing alright, Mom. It's been a year, and I'm proud and relieved and hopeful about how we're all coping.

Dad has a big, empty house now. He had so much to deal with, to work through this past year, but his spirit seems to have good boyency. He's super busy with his political work, and we see him pretty regularly. What a lot poor Dad has had to contend with this past year. But I'd say he's doing alright. He sure does miss you, though.

Michael and Lisa are engaged, and they seem to be doing well together. Michael is such a deep and solid and loving person. He's really been a great older brother for Joe, and just having him around makes me feel more like things are OK. You know that he and Maretta both seem to feel things deeply, and this has all been really hard on him. But you'd be so proud of how he carries himself, of his continued generous spirit. The world is a much better place for having Michael in the world.

Maretta's a married woman now. It was tough planning her wedding without you, but the day of the wedding, we all felt so much joy. It was wonderful. Beautiful. Maretta was (of course!) radiant, and she and Kyle seem so happy together. She's doing a lot of baking these days. I know she'd really like to be calling you to get advice and to check



in. You know/knew us so well...it's hard not to have you around to offer sage advice and to help remind us who we are.

Sometimes when I go shopping, I find myself suddenly really sad. While wondering the aisles of Target, I'll get a tightness in my chest, and it suddenly feels like all the air has been sucked out of the building. Like there isn't a way that I could possibly get enough air to fill my collapsed lungs. Lights become too bright, the room starts to spin. All because I was trying to figure out what kind of foundation to buy and I realized that you couldn't help me...wouldn't ever be able to help me...and you've always helped me pick out my makeup. Sometimes it seems like the big stuff I can handle but the little details are what bring me panting to my knees.

Joe's off at school now for his junior year. He's such a neat person. When he was home this summer, I kind of felt like I couldn't see him enough. It seemed like every time we got together some sad part of me is healed or deeply comforted. I love Joe so much, and I've so wished that I could make you not being here somewhat more OK for him. But you know, really, I can't. He's just got to find his own way to process and deal and find peace...just like all of us. Joe is one amazing person. He's reaching out for life and for experiences, and I'm excited about all that he could experience. Becky went off to Williams this fall. She really wishes that she'd had more time to spend with you. It's an exciting time for those kids. I feel lucky to know them both.

Terry is traveling out west this month. He's seeking out trains and beautiful scenery. Excel Inns is now sold, and T has some big thinking and decompressing and train spotting to do. He really misses your counsel and your friendship. Things just aren't the same without you.

Mom, when I think back on why I'm sad that you're not here, the one thing that always knots up my throat and makes tears spring to my eyes is the fact that you're not here to know and love Andrew and Sylvia. Last year, I was mostly really stoic until someone asked me how Michael, Maretta, and Joe were doing/would do. Then I immediately started crying. Over the last year, I've watched us all deal, and that pain doesn't feel as raw. We're OK. But it's just so unfair that you didn't get to know your grandkids more. It's terribly, terribly unfair for you, and it's also a real loss for them.

I can't believe you haven't met Sylvia. She's so wonderful, Mom. She's got so much sparkle, dimples, a smile that just leaps forth from her beautiful face. She radiates happiness. Except when she doesn't. That girl has opinions and knows her mind. She's not easily re-directed:) She loves people and is so very interested and engaged in the world around her. Andrew can almost always get a delighted ripple of laughter, and she looks at him with such adoration. Dressing that little girl is a tremendous joy. She has clothes that you would love. Details that you would admire...just so much fun stuff.

Sometimes when someone new meets her, I imagine it's you meeting her. You would oooo and ahhh over her toes (just like Andrew's), her elbows, her belly button, her long fingers, her sweet lips, the little strawberry on her head. You'd smile to see that she has long arms like your boys and that her eyes are blue like mine. This girl is a special one, Mom. She would have loved to know you.

Andrew is turning into such an amazing boy. The things he says! The tenderness of his heart. The earnestness of his thoughts and actions. He's playing with other kids now, and having a great time. He's able to convey more complex thoughts and to carry on a conversation. He still loves to be read to, he loves doing puzzles and playing memory, and he's still crazy about animals of all types. You'd know him well. Andrew's a year older, but to my eyes, he's still very centered in who he has been. And he remembers you, Mom. He misses you and wishes you could come back home. I'm so glad you have a grandchild who knew you. I means a lot to me.

Well, I'm going to have to go. Bryan's been giving Andrew his bath, and it's about my turn to do stories and bedtime. It's been nice talking to you. I wish the conversation could be two-way:)

With all my heart,  
Althea"

**Mid-August recap (2008-09-06 07:42)**



Sept. 6: I never got around to posting pictures and a write up of our mid-August, pre-DC activities. Pictures from just before and just after our trip are in the gallery.

On August 20, my family gathered at Ginza of Tokyo to send Joe and Becky off to college with a feast. Becky called us yesterday morning while she was on her way to her second day of classes. Sounds like things are going really well. Her hiking trip was a lot of fun, she said her roommate is a great fit, and she's loving her classes. She sounded really relaxed and happy. Makes me glad!

Joe is up at Bowdoin now. I haven't talked to him since getting back from my trip, but classes should have started for him as well.

Just as Becky and Joe were heading out to their colleges, Terry was heading out west for a month of scenic exploration. He was going to be totally crazy and reckless and go without a schedule, but that didn't end up working out. His detailed travel itinerary is attached below.

Bryan's dad came into town on Friday, August 22 to spend the weekend with Bryan when the kids and I left for DC. It worked out really well...we got to spend a nice morning with Granddad, and then Bryan got to spend three days with his dad. They explored Milwaukee, went to a Brewers game, enjoyed some music at the Orton Park Festival, played chess, and just got to spend some good one-on-one time together. Bryan really loves his dad, and we all miss spending regular, good, unstructured time together. This weekend was a good antidote to the gaps in our time

together. Thanks for coming up to spend time with my boy, Grandad!

### DC recap part I: Grace and Tim's (2008-09-08 00:00)



Sept. 8: I had such a fun time in Washington DC that I really wanted to take the time to write about some of our experiences. We saw a lot of different people and did a lot of fun things, so I thought I'd do several posts to break it up.

To start out with, we spent a couple days visiting Grace, Tim, and John. Grace and I went to graduate school together. And we've been happy to be able to carve out visits to see each other over the last couple years. 2006 pics and 2007 pics are in the gallery. There's a large, nay, ridiculously extensive collection of photos from our time together in the gallery. In my defense, though, how can I be moderate with picture taking with two such adorable boys doing such adorable things. John and Andrew are good friends.

We visited parks and Grace took me to a pottery studio that I love. LOVE LOVE LOVE. Greenbridge Studio. Their work

makes me so happy. Photos of the items I acquired are in the gallery. Oh, I love their pottery.

Then Grace, Tim, and John went rural New York for the week, and I headed over the Heather and Michael's (more on that later). On Friday, Bryan flew in to DC, and we returned to Grace's house for another weekend of fun highlighted by two sweet three-year-olds being cute.

Grace and Tim watched both Andrew and Sylvia while Bryan and I went to Kacy's rehearsal dinner on Friday night. It felt so amazing to be an adult with no kids for an evening! We had a wonderful time with Anne and Owen and Heather and Michael. I drank *two* glasses of wine, and we all laughed and laughed. Sylvia was back at home not laughing. So on Saturday night, I took her with me to the wedding, and she did a better than terrific job (a.k.a. she slept!).

The boys had a couple fun afternoons playing on the slip 'n slide, and on Sunday morning (while I went to a bridal shower for Kacy) the gang went nine-pin bowling. The photos (in the gallery) are so cute! Grace and Tim lent me their car during the week, so I learned my way around DC a bit more. I love creating mental maps of new locations.

Our visit was full of yummy meals; relaxing, comfortable times; ridiculous boys doing silly things; and just lots of good friendship. Thanks, guys, for a wonderful time!

**Sylvia's expanding diet (2008-09-08 13:27)**



Sept. 8: Sylvia is eating lots of non-milk items these days. It's such fun to introduce food to a new little person! We gave her her first meal back in late July. She's now eating (in pureed form) bananas, applesauce, pear sauce, peaches (and tiny bits of peach), peas, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe bits, rice cereal, and lots of cheerios. In fact, cheerios are my new way of distracting an unhappy baby. Pop one in her open mouth, and she often stops crying:) She's also recently discovered how to get her feet in her mouth (as demonstrated in the photo to the right). Sometimes I have a hard time getting her diaper on because she won't remove her toes from her mouth. Mmmmm. They are so yummy!

Cute photo shoots (2008-09-08 13:38)



Sept. 8: Last week I did a couple little photo shoots of the kids. In one, they were both naked about about to take a tubby together. I planned to get one good picture of the two of them together, but instead I got loads of sweet pictures, and one really good one of Sylvie. Pics are in the gallery.

Then last Thursday after Andrew's preschool orientation, both kids were wearing my favoritest outfits, so I did a little photo shot there as well. Andrew gave me about 10 seconds before he said "STOP!" I seriously really love these outfits. Both are from Bryan's mom. Oh, cute kids in cute clothes really does something for me! More pics in the same album of the gallery.



## Hanging out with Heather (2008-09-09 00:00)



Sept. 9: This could also be entitled Trip to DC recap part 2. Pictures are in the gallery.

It's been ages since I have been able to spend many days in a row with Heather. It felt lovely! My Heather-tank has been refilled. I went to Heather and Michael's house on Monday and stayed through Friday, and then we got to see each other at Kacy's wedding on Saturday as well.

Heather worked a bit while we were there, but mostly we had her to ourselves for fun-making. Michael, on the other hand, had to work a lot, so unfortunately, we didn't get to see as much of him. Heather is working for the Smithsonian where she is researching avian (bird) genetics. Michael is working for NIH, and I'm sorry Michael, but I have no idea what you are doing there other than a rough guess that it's something related to molecules...maybe proteins...and other small things. Wow. My memory is stunning. They are both doing pos-docs. They're both smart. Let's leave it at that.

Heather and Michael have a border collie named Pippin, and we all took several walks over the course of the week to a nearby playground. Andrew loved seeing Pippin climb on the equipment and even slide down the slide.

Heather took me to see some cute stores in downtown Takoma Park. My favorite was a store called Now and

Then that had great kids toys, beautiful gifts, yarn and knitting supplies...pretty much "hand me anything in the store and I'm happy" kind of place. Andrew enjoyed finishing off the day with some ice cream. OK, I enjoyed that too.



It was wonderful to get to spend some time with little Evelyn. She's such a peaceful and contented little girl. She's four months old now (a bit over two months younger than Sylvie), and her little personality is just blossoming. Aside from having strikingly beautiful eyes, they also look at you with an awareness that is almost startling. This little one is taking things in. Not much is going to get past little Evie!

She also made it clear that Sylvia has a comparatively dogged personality. When Evie is sad, Heather can (get this) hold her hand and she'll stop crying. She feels her mama's sweet hand, and she is comforted, and she stops crying. Sylvie's response has been, "WOMAN! I did not say hold my hand. I said PICK ME UP!" Don't cross Sylvie, man. That's all I'm saying.

Other times when Evie is fussy, Heather can sing her a song and she stops crying. She even smiles. And her smile is just so wonderful. I've recently learned that loud techno music can stop Sylvia from crying. Also, leaping wildly in the air/very active bouncing can sometimes quiet her. Usually I just do what she wants me to do or suffer the crying because she is not an easy one to distract at this point. Maybe next week. Perhaps next week she'll discover the joys of distraction. But I digress...



Mid-week, Heather took us to the National Zoo. Her offices are there, so I walked around with the three kids while she worked. Andrew loved seeing elephants, pandas, tigers, a hippo OUT OF THE WATER, prairie dogs, farm animals, an elephant shrew etc. If you ask him what he saw, though, he may well say, "We didn't see the cheetah." It's true. We missed the cheetah. If you ever have a chance to visit the National Zoo, I recommend it. It's a great zoo.

On Friday, Heather took us to the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. She also has offices there, and she attended some meetings while I took Andrew and Sylvie around the museum. Holy cow, we will be coming back. Andrew was beside himself. I think I need to do a separate post about the museum. See pics here. It was too cute.

Andrew ate an entire box of Trader Joe's peanut butter crackers during our visit. And about 12 Trader Joe's yogurts. Both are delicious, so purchase with caution.

Heather showed me how to make Jim Lahey's no-knead bread...a recipe I've been eying for years.

We thoroughly enjoyed our week in the Lerner household. Thanks, guys, for a wonderful time. I hope we can all join up again sometime soon.

PS. If you were curious, Heather post-doc work focuses on "establishing molecular and morphological phylogenies of Hawaiian songbirds." Thank, Google.

### Smithsonian - Roar! (2008-09-10 00:00)



Sept. 10: DC recap part 3 - We had a great time at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. It was like a wonderland for Andrew. The only problem was that he was so excited, we raced through it at nearly top speed. We'll have to go back! Pictures of our visit are in the gallery.

Andrew hasn't ever been to a museum where there were taxidermic dioramas or big dino bones. This museum had both - in spades. And we spent a good hour in their discovery room, where Andrew got some hands-on time with artifacts.

As Andrew raced from the mammals hall to the dino hall, he was often shouting out what he was seeing. "An okapi! There's an antelope! Look at the HIPPO! It's a...what do you call it? Pangolin!" I was trying to get pictures of him, but he was moving fast. His pointer finger was permanently extended, pointing out all the wonders around him.

After we'd explored the public part of the museum, Heather - a venerable Smithsonian staffer - took us on a back-stage tour of the Smithsonian's bird collections. Heather's adviser, Helen James, took me on a tour of some of the 640,000 bird specimens in an amazing library of stuffed bird bodies. We looked at the birds that Heather is studying in her research, and we walked by cases of birds collected by luminaries such as Darwin, Wallace, Audubon, and Teddy Roosevelt. It was really cool.

After a yummy lunch at the museum cafeteria, we headed home. But I'm glad to have friends living in the DC



area...because I know we'll want to come back! What a great museum for my little boy.

**What a beautiful wedding! (2008-09-11 00:00)**



Sept. 11: (aka DC recap volume four) The underlying reason for our trip to DC is because my lovely friend Kacy got married on Saturday, August 30. It was a stunning wedding.

Kacy, Anne, Heather, and I were good friends in high school...the Fab 4 was what we were called. We were all in cross-country, drama, mock trial, National Honor's Society, Kace and I were in debate...so lots of extra-curriculars! The four of us met up in DC in December to hang out together, but in general we only see each other in Wisconsin on holidays. So that all said, it was so much fun to spend a couple days hanging out together. We laughed and laughed and danced and couldn't stop smiling. It's so fun to be at a wedding where a friend is marrying a really great partner. It feels good.



Kacy did a beautiful job designing an elegant, fresh, beautiful event with many carefully tailored details. Photos are in the gallery. There were around 75 guests attending. They had an outdoor ceremony with a string quartet and cicadas providing background music.

I loved her flowers. Roses in pinks and reds, green and white hydrangeas, and pink calla lilies set the tone. The bridesmaids wore deep pinky red dresses. And her cake - it was stunning.

One nice idea she had was to frame wedding photos of family members and to have them on display on the mantels where the reception started. It was a nice way to tie in family. She also gave her bouquet to her grandma - who was clearly touched.

I loved discovering all the well-thought-out details. From the linens to the delicious menu to the way they had named their tables after places they had visited together, it was a really fun and polished affair.

We also really enjoyed attending the rehearsal dinner the evening before where I got to meet some of Kace's friends that I had heard a lot about over the years. It was fun to see her parents and brother again as I don't think I've seen them since high school!



On Sunday, Anne and I attended a bridal shower for Kace at the Tabord Inn. Another fun event...I'm so glad I was able to come to DC for her wedding!

### Eple Plukking (2008-09-11 07:43)



Sept. 11: Sylvia is seven months old today! Andrew is at preschool this morning, and Sylvia is napping. I got a couple loads of laundry going, and now I'm taking a half hour before a conference call to check favorite websites and to work on a new, prettier fall template. But first, I needed to delete the 30 or so spam comments and do a quick update on our weekend.

It was a relaxing, beautiful weekend, and it really started feeling like autumn. Lisa invited us on an apple picking outing, so on Saturday (after Lisa and Michael babysat Andrew for a few hours), we all went to the Eplegarden orchard. Lots of pictures are in the gallery. The trees in the open rows had been quite picked over, so all the remaining apples were way high in the trees. Fortunately we had two strong guys and one little guy, so Bryan and Michael hoisted Andrew up over their heads for most of our apples. I made apple pie and apple muffins shortly thereafter. Thanks, Lisa, for a fun outing!

I do love these boys (2008-09-11 18:45)



Sept. 11: We got together twice this week with Andrew's friends Wyatt and Eli. It is so much fun to watch those little guys play together! Wyatt's a big brother now. Little Clay is six weeks old, and as cute as a button. Sarah, Jessica, and I all went to the Monona Library's story hour together, and we also got together on Tuesday afternoon for a play date at Jessica's new home. It's hard to believe that when the three of us get together with kids that there are nine individuals to account for!

Pictures of our last several days are in the gallery.



Sept. 12: Having children often means acquiring lots of new stuff. Kids need so many things...furniture, clothes, toys, diapers, coats, shoes. And it's so easy to find those things cheap these days that it can be pretty easy to go overboard.

When I was in graduate school, I studied natural resources and read a lot about American's consumption habits. As a nation, we are incredible energy hogs. We buy too much stuff with too much packaging, we drive too much, we live in houses that are too big, we eat way too much. That all might not be a deal if it weren't that our consumptive habits have such a negative impact on the Earth. And that we're setting an example for much of the rest of the world that this is a great way to live. It's just not sustainable! We use so much more energy than other nations. It makes me very uncomfortable.

I try to live rather lightly. I'd like my kids to have the opportunity to live lightly on the Earth. So while we haven't achieved any milestones in sustainable living, we try to do our part by keeping our acquisitions to a minimum. Yet we're not lacking for anything. I've been the lucky recipient of so much baby gear, it's incredible. My friends have been very generous.

Looking around the kid's rooms tonight, I noted the following:

- Crib - hand-me-down from Maretta
- Sylvia's Dresser - hand-me-down from my co-worker, Sara's parents
- Changing table - hand-me-down from Bryan's co-worker, Matthew
- Rocking chair - garage sale find

- Andrew's dresser - garage sale find
- Andrew's bed - my bed growing up
- Andrew's bookshelf - hand-me-down from Terry
- Andrew's doll crib - mine growing up
- Andrew's table and chairs - Maretta and Joe's growing up

New things include: Sylvia's bookshelf, Andrew's rocking chair, their bedding, wall clocks, curtains, and rugs.

That makes me feel great! My kids have nice rooms. I love being in their rooms, and they are filled with things I really like. I love that much of the furniture is old things finding new life in our home.

I've been incredibly lucky with Andrew and Sylvia's clothes. In both cases, I bought a fun number of baby clothes myself. When Andrew was little, my friend Vicki handed us down all Alex's old clothes. For the first year or so, I think that about 3/4 of Andrew's clothes came from Alex. It was great! Now with Sylvia, we again are getting clothes from my neighbor Kathy and my friend Pam. It's been wonderful to have closets full of nice clothes to choose from. I like being able to buy some really special items to top off a full wardrobe! Bryan's mom is great at finding super-wonderful pieces for the kids. It rounds out their clothing supply beautifully.

When Andrew needs clothes, I usually check resale shops and garage sales first. When I find good brands, I stock up. I don't think his clothes have ever looked "used" (except perhaps when he stain them, but then he's using them!), and I feel good about getting the bulk of his clothes by recycling.

When it comes to toys, I feel like we have a good balance going in our house. We're not overrun by toys. Andrew has loads of puzzles, shelves of books, a big basket of stuffed animals, dolls, instruments, blocks, a train set, lots of animals, Noah's ark, a farm, a garage, a doctor's kit, dress-up items. His creative and learning needs are well-met. And yet, I really like the fact that when the house is cleaned up, stacks of children's books, Sylvia's high chair, play mat, and exersaucer, and a shelf of toys in the sun room are the main indicators that children live in the house. I like keeping the toy madness toned down in our home:)

So now that I've patted myself on the back about being so moderate about consumption, now comes the part of the post where I say what I want. I want lots of beautiful wooden toys. I want my kids to have them, but in truth, I want them for myself. Mom told me that she got all four of us kids double t-strap shoes because she had always wanted them as a kid. She knew that she was fulfilling her childhood wish by getting them for us, and she warned me that parents often do lots of things for their kids that are really things they wanted for themselves. She encouraged me to try to limit it to things like double t-strap shoes. For Christmas, Byan's parents (or perhaps Santa...I'm not sure which) got me a silk play bower for Sylvia. I think it whetted my appetite. Now, I want a fairy house.

I really hope Sylvia or Andrew want it, because I think they are going to get it.

I was looking through the Magic Cabin catalog, and I realized that assuming that Sylvia is our last child, some of the baby toys I may never have reason to buy (for myself) again. Will it be that I never by a cute wooden chew toy? Maybe that's OK. There's lots of wonderful, magical toys that are to come. But I started to think about what toys I want to be part of our life before those little kids of mine grow up. In fact, I made a list. A long list. Here's my \$1,000 wish list from Magic Cabin toys.

Join with me! Love very expensive, European-made, wooden and simple and imaginative toys that warm the soul!

### A long night (2008-09-14 09:50)



Sept. 14: It's 11:45am and Bryan and Sylvia are both napping. They both need the sleep. Last night felt a little like a Comedy of Errors. I went to bed around 11pm. At 1am I woke up to Sylvia crying (which is normal). But Bryan told me that she'd been up regularly for the last couple hours, and he'd just recently come to bed. She came down with a stuffy nose in the night and can't use her pacifier. So she was pretty unhappy. We both tried for a while to have her fall asleep. Sometime around 2, I think she fell soundly asleep. Soon after, Spooky (our cat) started barfing on on the bed. It was pretty startling to wake up to a cat making hacking noises while curled in my arms. So I tossed him off the bed where he proceeded to cat-yack all over our blankets. So we cleaned that up. Then around 3:30, Andrew crawled in bed with me. I dozed for a bit but then decided I should move him back to bed. I don't want him getting the idea that coming into our bed at night is a good idea. He didn't want to go back to bed, and it took about 15 minutes and some creative talking (his whale needed him to sleep with him so he'd have good dreams) to get him to agree to try falling asleep in his room. "But I want to sleep with you and DADDY!" he'd wail. Then at 5am, Sylvia woke up and really acted like she was not going to go back to bed anytime soon. So I got up with her and played with her in her room until Bryan came in to swap out with me at 6:30am. Sylvia seems like she doesn't feel quite right, and she got a runny nose. But we all then had a lovely morning with waffles and coffee for breakfast, playing in the sunroom, and some great dancing to first Stone Temple Pilots and then the Nutcracker by Bryan and Andrew. They got a good workout. Now Bryan's sleeping and I finally got Sylvia to sleep in her crib by holding her until she was sound asleep then transferring her. Life's pretty full right now!



Sylvia's seven-month appointment (2008-09-14 10:01)



Sept. 14: Sylvia had her seven-month appointment on Friday. Actually, it was her six-month appointment, but we're a little off-schedule because of our health-insurance change. She's getting to be a big girl! She weighed in at 16 lbs, measured 27" long, and has a head circumference of 44.8 cm.

This morning, I think she did her first successful crawling motions. She's been rocking on all fours for weeks, doing the plank and push-up positions for a while too, but until this morning, she hadn't moved her knees forward. Several times this morning, she moved a knee forward while reaching with the opposite hand. And in the last few days, she's beginning to move (mostly by oozing or schooching on her tummy). It's only a matter of time until she takes over the world. And her brother's toys. That's where she wants to go!



Sick baby girl (2008-09-16 19:59)



So the last several days have been kinda hard. Sylvia has been a sad, sad girl, especially at night. After she cried for several hours this morning, I made a doctor's appointment for her. We discovered an infected left ear. So my baby girl has an ear infection.

I debated whether to give her antibiotics, and decided that she's been unhappy enough that it's a good idea to treat it. These days, doctors are starting to recommend that mild ear infections not be treated because of the gross overuse of antibiotics. Sylvie's doctor characterized her ear infection as moderate. If you're interested, Mayo Clinic, and Dr. Greene have articles about the use of antibiotics for treating ear infections.

Hopefully she'll start feeling better soon.

In other news, Sylvia waved for the first time today. She waved bye-bye to her dad this morning and to the receptionist at the clinic this afternoon. What a big girl!

**Sylvie is improving! (2008-09-18 07:36)**



Sept. 18: Things are going much better in our home. On Tuesday evening, I started Sylvie on her antibiotics. She had a much better night than the previous three, and yesterday, she seemed like she was pretty much back to her normal, chipper self. In fact, seeing her beaming smile sort of surprised me. Amidst all the crying and the night-waking, I'd sort of forgotten how happy she normally is!

She's drinking down her medicine well, and she's seeming like she's no longer in pain. Good things! Sylvie's smile is like the sunshine, and it feels good after some very cloudy days.

**No preschool today (2008-09-18 07:41)**

Sept. 18: I've got a runny-nosed Andrew sitting next to me this morning. His nose has been very, er, productive, recently. So we decided to keep him home from preschool this morning. He wanted to go, but he was all right with our joint decision to stay home.

I was a little bummed because I had been looking forward to my quiet time this morning! Oh well. Maybe tomorrow.

**Peace is a cup of coffee and birds at my feeder (2008-09-19 07:22)**



Sept. 19: I would be giddy if I weren't so relaxed:) Andrew went in to preschool today. Sylvia is napping. I have a nice homemade vanilla latte and my computer and an hour or so of totally uninterrupted time (I hope). It's a cool fall morning, and my bird feeder is teeming with birds. For the last four years, I've only gotten the occasional bird. I mostly feed dratted squirrels and blasted house sparrows. But this morning, suddenly, I have cardinals, chickadees, white breasted nuthatches, house finches, downy woodpeckers, American goldfinches, and a robin nearby for good measure. The air is humming with birdy chirps. Where did they come from? How did they decide that my feeders are now a good idea? Who knows, but I'm enjoying watching them. I may even take photos if I weren't so enjoying sitting in my comfy chair!

After all the runny noses and Sylvia-crying and general illness of the week, this moment feels like bliss.

## Off to preschool again (2008-09-19 07:26)



Sept. 19: Andrew stayed home from preschool yesterday, and this morning was really borderline. He has such a runny nose. I've actually wanted to photograph Andrew with his funny, "I just sneezed big and I need help wiping!" look, but I thought that would be a little too gross for all my gentle readers out there. I'm hoping that when I pick Andrew up at 1:45 today that his teaches don't say, "Bad idea having him come today, Mom!" We'll see. He really wanted to go, and I think that the running/sneezing incidents had slowed from their just-woke-up-sneeze-it-all-out status. In any case, he's having fun now, and so am I!

## Andrew's first fundraiser - Buy Now! (2008-09-19 12:27)

✕ Sept. 19: Andrew came home from preschool today with info on the first school fundraiser in our family's history. And I've got to say, Monona Grove Nursery School seems to have picked a good one! Items include cookie dough, cinnamon rolls, and Butter Braids frozen pastries. Info on the yummy items for sale is below. If you'd like to order anything, send me a note. If you live afar, I can mail it to you. The last day to submit your order is Oct. 1.

✕ Butter Braids Frozen Pastries  
Butter Braid is a 22 oz. Frozen Pastry dough. When baked, it produces a homemade tasting breakfast entree or dessert.

It needs to rise 8-12 hours (rise till double in size). Bake for 20-25 minutes to make a delicious special pastry!

\$11 each

Flavors to choose from:

apple, Bavarian creme, blueberry/cream cheese, caramel rolls (9 count), cherry, cinnamon, cream cheese, raspberry

If you want some of these in your freezer, please let me know how many of each flavor you would like.

Party Time cookie dough

MMmmmm...cookie dough... I like the idea of having a three-pound tub of cookie dough in my fridge:)

Scoop the dough onto a cookie sheet and bake-it's just that easy.

Each tub makes 96 half-ounce cookies. The dough lasts six months in the freezer or 3 mo in the fridge.

\$14 each

Flavors to choose from:

chunky chocolate chip, made with M &M's, peanut butter, oatmeal raisin, sugar, monster (Peanut butter and oatmeal base with chocolate chips, peanut butter chips, and candy-coated chocolate pieces), triple chocolate, snickerdoodle, white chocolate macadamia nut, peanut butter with chocolate chunks, made with Heath English toffee,

Also, for \$14, you can order two-dozen cinnamon rolls

To order the cookie dough, please let me know how many tubs of each flavor you would like.

Colored sugar cookie dough

Making creative sugar cookies has never been easier. This made-from-scratch dough allows you to play and create your own cookies in rainbow colors. Create flowers, animals, words, or anything you can imagine. Produced in the heartland, using only the finest ingredients. Comes in blue, green, red, and yellow.

\$14 for four 14 ounce tubs (total weight is 3.5 pounds)

If this sounds like fun, please let me know how many orders you would like (each order includes four colors of cookie dough).

Your last day to order is Wednesday, October 1. Thanks so much for helping to support Andrew's wonderful preschool.

The orders are being delivered on Thursday, November 13th. Checks should be made out to me (I'm supposed to submit one check for the entire order). Also, if you'd like to support Andrew's school without indulging in any of these baked goods, you can write a check to Monona Grove Nursery School.

Sting, heat, and girls and guys (2008-09-19 20:17)



Sept. 19: Well Bryan and Andrew are probably in Indiana or Michigan at this point. They're on their way to Ann Arbor for a weekend visiting some of Bryan's old co-workers. They are planning to spend a lovely day tomorrow at Mark and Diane's lakefront home. It should be a really good time. Meanwhile, Sylvia and I are holding down the fort here at home. We didn't think Sylvie would be up for a seven hour drive, a day of play, and then another seven hour drive. She can be very vociferous about things she doesn't like.

So Andrew did well at preschool today. His teachers said that his nose didn't run too much:) This afternoon, Sylvia started running a low fever. When she went to bed this evening, it was about 101. I called the doctor, and they said that a low fever was probably a sign that her body is still fighting off that ear infection. Poor girl seems just about normal, but I think she's still a little sick.

Then this afternoon, we were out on the front lawn together, and a bee landed on Sylvia and stung her on the arm! She was just sitting on the quilt minding her own business. Now I like bees in general, but if there are any bee-readers out there, please note that you are not allowed to sting my babies. Stay away. Sylvia cried a bit, but she recovered relatively quickly. At the end of the day, though, she still had an angry red welt on her sweet chubby arm.

I've uploaded some pictures from the last week. They can be found in the gallery.



## Thoughts on grief (2008-09-20 18:42)



Sept. 20: I am relaxing this evening by reading a book called *Traveling Mercies* by Anne Lamott. She's one of my favorite authors. For moms out there, her book *Operating Instructions* really kept me laughing in the weeks after Andrew was born. Anne's lifelong friend Pammy died of breast cancer at age 37, and she has written some really poignant things about what her grief felt like.

In fact, I thought one of her chapters was so right-on that I excerpted it below.

Anne Lamott *Traveling Mercies*

### *Ladders*

In May of 1992 I went to Ixtapa with Sam, who was then two and a half. At the time, Pammy had been battling breast cancer for two years. I also had a boyfriend with whom I spoke two or three times a day, whom I loved and who loved me. Then in early November of that year, the big eraser came down and got Pammy, and it also got the boyfriend, from whom I parted by mutual agreement. The grief was huge, monolithic.

All those years I fell for the great palace lie that grief should be gotten over as quickly as possible and as privately. But what I've discovered since is that lifelong fear of grief keeps us in a barren, isolated place and that only grieving can heal grief; the passage of time will lessen the acuteness, but time alone, without the direct experience of grief, will not heal it. San Francisco is a city in grief, we are a world in grief, and it is at once intolerable and a great opportunity. I'm pretty sure that it is only by experiencing that ocean of sadness in a naked and immediate way that we come to be healed - which is to say, that we come to experience life with a real sense of presence and

spaciousness and peace. I began to learn when Sam and I went back to the same resort three months after Pammy's death.

...

Grief, as I read somewhere once, is a lazy Susan. One day it is heavy and underwater, and the next day it spins and stops at loud and rageful, and the next day at wounded keening, and the next day numbness, silence. I was hoarse for the first six weeks after Pammy died and my romance ended, from shouting in the car and crying, and I had blisters on the palm of one hand from hitting the bed with my tennis racket, bellowing in pain and anger.

But on the first morning in Mexico, the lazy Susan stopped at feeling of homesickness, like when my parents sold the house where I grew up.

I woke before Sam and lay in my bed in the cool, white adobe room, filled with memories of my first day here the year before. I remembered calling Pammy and my lover that first morning, how they gasped with pleasure to hear my voice. I lay there thinking this time that I had made a dreadful mistake to return, that I was not ready to laugh or play or even relax, and I wondered whether or not God had yet another rabbit that he or she could pull out of the hat. Then my Oedipal little son woke up and hopped over to my bed. He patted my face for a while and said tenderly, "You're a beautiful girl."

...

On the third day in Mexico Tom told me that Jung, some time after his beloved wife died, said, "it cost me a great deal to regain my footing. Now I am free to become who I truly am." And this is God's own truth: the more often I cried in my room in Ixtapa and felt just generally wretched, the more often I started to have occasional moments of utter joy, of feeling aware of each moment shining for its own momentous sake. I am no longer convinced that you're supposed to get over the death of certain people, but little by little, pale and swollen around the eyes, I began to feel a sense of reception, that I was beginning to receive the fact of Pammy's death, the finality. I let it enter me.

I was terribly erratic: feeling so holy and serene some moments that I was sure I was going to end up dating the Dalai Lama. Then the grief and craziness would hit again, and I would be in Broken Mind, back in the howl.

The depth of the feeling continued to surprise and threaten me, but each time it hit again and I bore it, like a nicotine craving, I would discover that it hadn't washed me away.

After a while it was like an inside shower, washing off some of the rust and calcification in my pipes. It was like giving a dry garden a good watering. Don't get me wrong: grief sucks; it really does. Unfortunately, though, avoiding it robs us of life, of the now, of a sense of living spirit. Mostly I have tried to avoid it by staying very busy, working too hard, trying to achieve as much as possible. You can often avoid the pain by trying to fix other people; shopping helps in a pinch, as does romantic obsession. Martyrdom can't be beat. While too much exercise works for many people, it doesn't for me, but I have found that a stack of magazine can be numbing and even mood altering. But the bad news is that whatever you use to keep the pain at bay robs you of the flecks and nuggets of gold that feeling grief will give you. A fixation can keep you nicely defined and give you the illusion that your life has not fallen apart. But since your life may indeed have fallen apart, the illusion won't hold up forever, and if you are lucky and brave, you will be willing to bear disillusion. You begin to cry and writhe and yell and then to keep on crying; and then, finally, grief ends up giving you the two best things: softness and illumination.

## Penicillin Allergy? (2008-09-22 08:37)



Sept. 22: A couple moments ago, I noticed that Sylvia is developing a light, blotchy rash on her face and neck. Since she's taking amoxicillin (she's on day six), I called her doctor right away since it may be an allergic reaction. She's feeling much better in general. Her fever went away yesterday. It'll be interesting to see whether they'll test her to see if the rash is an actual allergic reaction or if it is (like Dr. Greene notes below) a non-allergic reaction. We shall see.

From Dr. Greene.com

### Penicillin Allergy

Parents are often led to believe that their children are allergic to amoxicillin or one of the other penicillins. Problems such as skin rashes, nausea, diarrhea, or the fact that they have relatives with penicillin allergies, result in 8 % to 20 % of children being identified with these allergies.

When these 'allergic' children are actually tested, 80 % of them turn out not to be allergic, according to the December 2000 issue of *Infectious Diseases in Children*. And of those few who are allergic, 80 % will no longer be allergic if retested years later.

Much of the confusion comes from the fact that up to 9 % of healthy children will develop a non-itchy, non-allergic, red rash 7 to 10 days into a course of amoxicillin. Why is this distinction important?

Labeling a child as allergic might prompt a doctor to choose a more expensive, broader spectrum antibiotic next time around – resulting in more side effects and more resistant bacteria. If you suspect a penicillin allergy in your family, tell your doctor exactly what led to this suspicion. If your child needs antibiotics often, a skin test to confirm the problem may prove worthwhile. Most children can safely receive these gentler antibiotics – if an antibiotic is needed.

**Itchy, itchy girl (2008-09-23 07:08)**



Sept. 23: Sylvia is taking a nap. She is one very itchy, splotchy, rashy girl.

I took her in to the doctor last night, and the guy we saw said that they don't differentiate between an allergic and a non-allergic rash reaction to penicillin. His opinion was that there are plenty of good alternatives to penicillin and it's not worth the resources to do a skin allergy test. I'm not sure if I agree, but it might not matter, because late last night, Sylvia's rash was really itchy. It was driving her nuts. And according to what I've read, that's a sign of a true penicillin allergy.

She's still running a low fever, and the doctor last night said that her left eardrum was still red and swollen, and he said that the right ear was also infected! Poor sweet girl! Ear infections and a body-wide rash.

The doctor switched her to an erythromycin-based antibiotic and told me to give her oatmeal baths, cold compresses, and Benadryl if she got itchy. A few hours after our doctor's visit, she did indeed get hugely frantic and itchy, and I rushed over to Walgreens to get some Benadryl for her. I can't believe that I'm giving my small, sweet baby so many drugs, but I'm glad they're available for her.

Here's for hoping that the rash goes away in the next few days and her ear infection clears up! I posted some pictures of her rashy progression in the gallery (I know, I'm odd).

I found an interesting article on drug-induced skin rashes on Medscape.

### **Before she got sick... (2008-09-23 15:12)**

Sept. 23: Here's a video of Sylvia munching on some food and being cute. That was before she was a spotted lobster. [EMBED]

### **The rash is dissipating (2008-09-24 07:11)**

Sept. 24: Sylvia's face looks almost normal this morning. However, if you look down at her torso or legs, she's still a splotchy, red lobster. Last night she had a hard time. She was up every half hour from 7 until 1. I gave her Benadryl at 10 or 11, and at 1am I gave her some Motrin. Seemed like maybe she was in pain as opposed to itchy because the Motrin did the trick. She slept from 1 until 4 or 5.

My poor little chipmunk. I hope her ears start feeling much better soon.

### **Nighttime H-E-double toothpicks (2008-09-25 08:24)**

Sept. 25: The sun is out, the September air is cool and crisp and fair. Sylvia is nursing and not all-together happy, but it's worlds better than the nighttime agony that the poor little dear was experiencing last night. From the time we put her down until around midnight she woke up arching her back and howling every 20-30 minutes. We'd bounce her and I'd nurse her and we'd let her fall asleep in our arms. We'd carefully lay her down in bed, and either she would immediately wake or she'd wake after a short interval.

At least Andrew is a sound sleeper!

We let her cry herself to sleep around midnight, and she slept until 2. Then around 5:30, she was up again and wouldn't let me lay her down. So we dozed together on the sofa. She slept upright on my chest, and I dozed-while-sitting. We were able to lay her in her bed around 7am.

I called the doctor, and they said to keep her dosed on Motrin and to give the antibiotics another day to kick in.

Figuring that overnight stays in a hotel would be a complete nightmare, I canceled our trip to Northfield (for my Alumni Council meeting). Bryan's parents were going to meet us in Northfield because Bryan's dad is giving a talk in the Twin Cities today. Instead, they'll drive down to Madison on Friday and spend a couple days here before driving back up on Sunday.

Andrew's at preschool this morning...having a blast.

poor little Sylv. I hope she feels better soon.

### **Friends make a day feel better (2008-09-25 12:51)**

Sept. 25: The day is going much better than last night did. Sylvia is on her second good nap of the day. While Andrew was at preschool, I got my car washed with the plan of photographing it and putting it up for sale on craigslist. Jessica, Eli, and Celia came over for lunch after preschool today, and we had Malt-O-Meal muffins and picnicked outdoors on this beautiful, beautiful day.

Sylvia's spirits have been OK, and Andrew and Eli got in some good play-time together. Talking and laughing and de-compressing with a friend is a good way to make a blah day better again.

### **Hair-raising story (2008-09-25 12:56)**

I've been having a hair crisis, but it has reached a very happy conclusion. My hairdresser, Liz, has been doing my hair for about four years. I love getting my hair done by her. I also really like her. So about a week ago, the salon called to tell me that Liz was no longer at the salon, and they wondered if they could reschedule me with a different stylist. "She has taken a new career path," they said. Ahhhhhhh!!!!

I held off on posting about this because although it deeply troubled me, it seemed rather superficial to be so upset about a person's hairdresser going AWOL. I mean, we had a long-term relationship! She didn't mention that she was thinking about leaving! Couldn't she have found a way to say goodbye? Did I value our relationship more than she did? How could she break up with me by just disappearing?

I knew what street she lived on and considered walking down it calling for her. "Liz, even if you aren't a hair-stylist any more, can you please just do my hair?" LIZ!! Please!

But I pulled myself together, decided not to be a stalker, and I made an appointment at Ananda Salon. Sad, resigned.

Then today a postcard. It was from Liz. She has started her own salon right near my home called THORPS. They're specializing in cut and color. Oh, sweet relief! Liz and me. BFF again.

### **I think we're all healthy again (2008-09-29 13:00)**

Sept. 29: Wow, I can't believe that it's almost the end of September! When did that happen?

I'm in the processes of backing up my computer, but I thought I'd take a moment before I step away from the computer to make dinner to quickly update that Sylvia seems healthy. She's a happy girl during the day again. Still waking pretty frequently at night though...

This morning, I was so surprised to see Sylvia crawling down the hall from the bathroom to the kitchen. She really got everything synched up for a good, long crawl. Usually she's staying within about a five-foot area.

Bryan's parents were here for the weekend (since we canceled our Northfield trip due to Sylvia's unhappiness). We had a really, really nice time. Photos are in the gallery!



## 4.10 October

Saying "Dada" (2008-10-01 08:26)



Oct. 1: This morning, Sylvia and I were lying in bed while Bryan got ready for work. Sylvia kept repeating, "Dadadadadadadad." I was trying to figure out if she was talking about her Dada, so I said, "Dada is going byebye." She waved and said "baba dada baba dada dada dada." Bryan didn't feel like it was a certain enough statement to be her first word, but it was at least her first meaningful babble!

In other news, I took her to the doctor this morning to check her ears to see if they are all clear. And...they are healthy ears! So that's the upside. Sylvia might not like the ramifications, though, because I am currently letting her holler in her crib. She's forgotten how to take normal, decent naps, and now that I know that she's not suffering from an ear infection, I'm going to be a harder-hearted mommy and try to help her re-learn how to take naps and sleep

for longer stretches at night. Wish us luck!

### **Crawling in her sleep (2008-10-02 07:55)**

Oct. 2: Well the good news is that Sylvia is sleeping much better at night and took some good naps yesterday. I only really had to let her cry yesterday morning (it was a 40 minute doozie), and then she seemed to remember how to fall asleep and stay asleep.

I was about to write a post about how much I was enjoying my quiet morning with Andrew at preschool and Sylvia napping when I heard a "clunk" and she woke up yelling. She'd only been sleeping for about 40 minutes, so I gave her the pacifier and left her to fall back asleep. Well now she's been crying for about 10 minutes, and I don't think she's going to get back to sleep. Poor girl!

I'm going to rescue her now. I hope she'll stop trying to crawl around the crib while sleeping!

### **Boy loves his preschool (2008-10-04 21:24)**



Oct. 4: Andrew was really disappointed that he couldn't go to preschool today. So Bryan offered to play preschool with him. It was pretty sweet.

Andrew's been coming home singing songs, showing off his artwork, and skipping and dreaming about when he can go back. Everything I've seen about his preschool makes me love it. It's all so gentle and play-oriented.

I had a short conference with his teachers, Sue and Emily, on Thursday. They are really enjoying Andrew, and I got the pleasure of having other adults talk warmly about my sweet boy. Good preschool times!

### **Granny and Grandad's visit (2008-10-04 21:39)**



Oct. 4: It's been a little hard to post this past week. Sylvia is continuing to only sleep for 20-40 minutes before waking up. And then she's really not going back to sleep. So...that's been fun.

But, what was fun was to have Granny and Grandad come visit us last weekend. Andrew got to show his preschool off to his grandparents. The boys all went to the zoo on Saturday, and they both got lots of Sylvia time. Sylvie is so amazing right now. I'm really glad that they got to see her as she's transitioning from a cuddly baby to an active little one.

Granny is driving up to see us next Sunday, so we're looking forward to seeing her again soon! Photos of their visit are in the gallery.

Orchard afternoon (2008-10-04 21:54)



Oct. 4: Sarah, Wes, Charlie and our gang met at Door Creek Orchard this afternoon to enjoy the lovely day. Being a picturesque location, we took loads of photos. I can't get enough of my sweet kids:)

Andrew was having a good time covering Sylvia in grass. She was having a great time munching on said grass. Perhaps she believes she is an ungulate.

OK, I've got to turn off the computer. It's midnight! Tomorrow afternoon/evening I'm going to American Players Theater and Bryan will have both kids. Wish him luck if you wouldn't mind. He hasn't had Sylvia on his own very much, and these days she's pretty keen on having her mom around. Hopefully it'll be a good experience!



**Parenting: Choices may be harder than they appear (2008-10-05 08:39)**



Oct. 5: Sylvia has me at a parenting low this morning. I laid her down for her morning nap, and she cried and cried. Last night when I put her down to sleep, she was quiet for about 20 minutes and then she screamed...not just cried...for about a half hour. That little girl has very strong opinions, and one of them is that she's not so in to sleeping these days. The whole topic is sort of breaking me into little bits.

This little girl needs a consistent sleeping pattern. Her ear infections got her way off her game, but even before that...throughout August...she has had an erratic, not-very-happy sleeping existence. At night she's back to waking every three hours and then going straight back to sleep. I'd rather her sleep for five plus hours at this point, but I'm not too worried about it. It's the daytime naps, especially the waking after 20-40 minutes that is driving me crazy.

And if that was all the sleep she needed, I'd figure I just didn't get a baby who needed much sleep (oh, well!), but she does very much need more sleep. After two lousy naps, she's a total crab apple. Just as I'm trying to get supper ready.

When she was sick, I picked her up and nursed or rocked her each time she woke up. But that resulted in her waking

every thirty minutes or so for hours at night. Since she's been healthy (for the last six days), I've been letting her cry herself to sleep when she won't go down or when she wakes mid-nap. She's a determined girl. There's a lot of crying.

I wish that parenting were easier. I wish that if you loved your baby more than anything you would just be able to do the right thing. But I've seen with Andrew and now with Sylvia that what they need more than anything else is a good parent. And from my perspective, being a good parent doesn't (unfortunately) mean always doing what the baby wants. It is doing what is best for the baby, and for the family, so that everyone gets their needs met (whether they want them met or not!). From napping to discipline to manners and routines, sometimes the parent has to be the "bad guy." Kids need their parents to set limits, to say "no," to be consistent and firm as well as flexible and giving. I really don't like, though, how much it can hurt my heart to be the kind of parent that I think and somehow know that my kids need.

I'm open to any suggestions anyone has about how to get Sylvia sleeping more consistently. Right now I put her down for her morning nap between 9 and 10 am and her afternoon nap between 1 and 2 pm. All I do before her nap is nurse her. She doesn't like me to read or sing to her.

We're thinking about switching the nursing to be just after she wakes up. Before her nap, I think we might try giving her a massage or rocking her in the dark room.

I feel like this time with Sylvia is particularly hard because it's really just me who is responsible for her napping. When Andrew was little, Karen, Bryan, and I were all sometimes responsible for putting him down for naps. That had its own challenges. But with Sylvia, there's no outside-the-family childcare, and due to division of labor and doing what is easiest, I'm the one who puts Sylvia down while Bryan takes care of Andrew. I guess that makes it a little easier to be consistent, but it also makes me feel that the responsibility for Sylvia's sleeping unhappiness rests primarily squarely on my shoulders. It's a heavy weight.

OK, I think I've had enough feeling sorry for myself. Off to get dressed and fold some laundry. Have a good Sunday! Wish Sylvia a long nap. It's been about 20 minutes now since she stopped yelling...



## iPod madness (2008-10-08 19:22)



Oct. 8: I've ripped 1,000 songs in the last couple days. It's been an all-day affair. Tom got an iPhone a while back, and since iPhones are also iPods, he offered me his iPod. This is new territory for me. I've never had an mp3 listening device. But now with this new gadget, I'm excited to re-vamp my music-listening habits. We've got loads of CDs, most of which we haven't listened to in years. My plan is to rip all our CD to the computer. I'll hook up the iPod to our stereo. It'll hold all our music. I'll keep the CDs that we like and actively use, and I think the rest we'll find new homes for.

It takes 10 minutes or so to rip a CD. Andrew's been very engaged in watching and counting as each track is checked off. Then he gets to put the new CD in the computer. He's have a great time. We're both somewhat obsessive personalities:)

I'm about a quarter of the way through my CD collection. I'm excited to use the playlists and other nifty features to shake-up my music-listening habits. I often listen to the same 5 CDs for months...even years at a time. Hey, when I find something I like, I don't seem to mind listening to it over, and over, and over and over. Should be fun to re-explore some of my old music and maybe try out some new tunes too. I found that nearly all our CDs are from the 1990s. Except for the recent influx of children's music! If you have favorite artists or albums, let me know! I'm game to explore.

### Amazing October morning (2008-10-09 08:03)



Oct. 9: October is undoubtedly my favorite month. Unless you were to ask me in May. Or maybe June. September is good too. But October. I think it's #1. This morning is sunny and with a brilliantly blue sky. The maples are all just starting to turn, so there's lots of green with bright splashes of scarlet and fiery orange and that amazing yellow. Yellow locus tree leaves against the blue, blue sky. Nothing like it!

In case you were wondering, this is a post about my abiding love for autumnal beauty. It is not a post about how Sylvia is not napping this morning. [I had to stop for a moment there. Sylvia just discovered the cat's food for the first time. Fishing cat food kibble out of her mouth...] She almost fell asleep while we walked Andrew to preschool. But then she cried for a half hour in her crib before I decided a nap was right out for a while.

By the way, on the walk to preschool, Andrew said a couple delightful things.

"Hip hip hooray! It's preschool today!"

"You're the best mommy. Even better than I'm an Andrew."

Have a good morning!

### Best fudgy brownies (2008-10-09 08:49)

Oct. 9: [Note: Sylvia just fell asleep after working on it for an hour and a half. I'd go in to pick her up and soothe her, and she'd yawn and yawn. So we took a break and spent some time outdoors, I put her down, she cried for 10 minutes, I held her and bounced her, and at long last, she fell soundly asleep. Hope it lasts at least a half hour. Cat-food-breath was one tired girl.]

In other news, I've recently been making a brownie recipe that I found on a bag of King Arthur Flour. It's so good. So Good. I had to share.

## The Best Fudge Brownies Ever

1 cup (8 ounces) butter,  
2 1/4 cups sugar  
1 1/4 cups Dutch process cocoa  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 tablespoon vanilla extract  
4 large eggs  
1 1/2 cup King Arthur unbleached all purpose  
2 cups chocolate chips, semi-sweet

Note: Increase salt to 1 teaspoon if you are using unsalted butter.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly grease a 9×13 inch pan. (I lined mine with aluminum foil).

In a medium-sized microwave-safe bowl, or in a saucepan set over low heat, melt the butter then add the sugar and stir to combine. Return the mixture to the heat (or microwave for 1 minute) and heat until mixture is very hot but not bubbling; it'll become shiny looking as you stir it. Heating the butter and sugar a second time will dissolve more of the sugar, which will yield a shiny top crust on your brownies.


Transfer the mixture to a bowl (if you melted the butter and sugar in the mixing bowl, you don't have to transfer anything).

Stir in the cocoa, salt, baking powder and vanilla. Add the eggs, beating till smooth; then add the flour and chips, stirring until combined. Spoon the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake the brownies for 28 minutes, until a cake tester inserted into the center comes out dry. Remove them from the oven and after 5 minutes, loosen the edges with a table knife. This helps prevent sinking as they cool. Cool completely then cut and serve.

Makes 2 dozen brownies

## Ear infection: part deux (2008-10-11 07:01)

 Oct. 11: Sylvia has had a really rough week. She's not been sleeping for much more than 20 minutes (other than one blessed 80 minute nap), and she's not been getting more than an hour of sleep between the time she wakes and when we put her down for the night. Then she's been waking every hour or so in the evening. It's been rough. For everyone. I'm kind of kicking myself, because I thought she was just really off her schedule and teething (she's getting a new bottom tooth), but it turns out that she has an ear infection again. Left ear. I took her in yesterday after a particularly rough night of waking and inconsolable crying.

She started on a new antibiotic last night, and already this morning there was a big improvement. I'd forgotten that it's possible to sometimes put her down without having her cry, to leave the room even without a howl following me. She went down for her morning nap without protest...10 minutes so far. Her eyes still look rather "off." Sick or super

tired or hurt. Hopefully after a few days of this new antibiotic she'll be feeling even better.

#### Development milestones (2008-10-11 07:06)



Oct. 11: Amidst a week of major unhappiness, Sylvia is still charging forward on her quest to grow up. On Thursday night, she pulled herself up to standing in her crib. Never mind that she pulled herself up as she was screaming in her crib after we attempted to put her down for the 8th time at 10pm... She's been going from lying down to sitting for quite a few weeks, and she often wakes up a little bit and sits right up, making it hard for her to fall back asleep again. She's not crawling in her sleep anymore (at least she's not bashing her head while trying to crawl!), but there's lots of sitting up and now standing in the crib. It's truly shocking to see my baby standing in the crib! She hasn't pulled up on anything else yet, but she's started reaching up to pull things off the coffee table. And she loves crawling over to the front door and trying to push through the screen! She's got some get-up-and-go. And a whole lot of get-up-and-follow-her-brother!

**Playing with Granny (2008-10-13 19:20)**



Oct. 13: We have Granny here for the week! I'm taking a big sigh of relief. Sylvia is on the mend, and I have some major child-care assistance. In fact, today I only moderately assisted with child-care. It felt so nice to have a little break. LuAnn drove up all the way from Texas. My white car is going, going, going... To our great delight, relief, and surprise, Bryan's parents offered us their Toyota Camry as a replacement. LuAnn drove from Texas up to Wichita last week and then on Friday did the 11 hour trek to Madison. She's amazing.

I used some of my free time this afternoon to process some of the many, many photos I've taken in the last week. The fall color is so incredible. We've been having fun in the out-of-doors!

Photos of Andrew and Alivia having a painting fest, Sylvia crawling in the back yard, and the young girl munching on some breakfast are in the gallery.



**October, outdoors, outstanding (2008-10-13 19:51)**



Oct. 13: We've had some great outdoor adventures this past week. It's been warm, it's been sunny, the trees have been oh-so colorful. It's been great.

On Wednesday after story hour, Jessica and I took our kids to the Aldo Leopold Nature Center. I'm regretful to admit that I have never been there before. It was a wonderful, wonderful afternoon. The boys were so sweet together, running amidst the prairie grasses, the girls had fun being carried and then hanging out on a grassy clearing, and we basked in the realness of it all. Afterwards we stopped by a great yarn store I hadn't been to before. Off the Beaten Path was so great! Mareta, next time you're in town, we're going there!

Jessica and I met for some knitting on Thursday night. I just love sitting with friends, drinking warm beverages, and knitting or talking and in either case, laughing. It restores my soul.

On Friday, we returned to the Door Creek Orchard with Jessica and family and with Terry. We had a nice picnic amidst the apple-laden trees, and we bought many jugs of cider. The boys had fun looking at the black Welsh mountain sheep. They then crawled around on the grass pretending to be Art and Andy, sheep.

On Sunday, we met my dad out at Cherokee Marsh and had a wonderful time walking through the forest and the prairie. It's one of my very favorite places on earth. That and Jack's place. Beautiful.

As the sun came up today, the trees behind our house were glowing with a purplish-red. Our tree out front is starting



to turn yellow. It's a wonderful time of year.

**Best buds (2008-10-14 00:00)**

Everyone should have a friend who makes you feel really good.



More pictures of our trip to the Leopold Nature Preserve are in the gallery.

**A new tooth! (2008-10-14 00:00)**

Oct. 14: Sylvia's third tooth is on it's way in. A corner appeared yesterday. Looks like she's going to have four teeth on the bottom before she gets any on the top. Tooth #3 is the left bottom guy. She seems like she's doing alright. No drooling, but lots of chomping on her finger.

In other news, Sylvia said "mama" when she saw me two times recently. She's continuing to say "dada" about a lot of things, but notably about Bryan. And when I asked her if she was all done with her food, she repeated "ahhhdah." Speech is coming to this young girl!

She does however appreciate the power of a well-placed yell.

In other news, Heather did a really nice post about our trip to DC in August. She said some awfully nice things about my kiddos. Thanks, Heather. My spirit is always buoyed when I read sweet things about my kids. I'm glad you enjoy them so much too.

### **So much to write! (2008-10-21 20:47)**

Oct. 21: When I don't post in several days, this...thing...happens to me. I get all twitchy and sort of nervous. I've got about six posts I'm trying to hold onto in my brain, and it's making me a bit crazy. But Sylvia just started crying, so I'm not going to free my mind yet!

OK, it's 11pm and the wee one is fed. Andrew was calling for me an hour ago. When I went into his room, I discovered that he was completely encased in his blankets. And stuck. He had somehow gotten down to the foot of his bed, cocooned in his blankets. I had to pull and roll him a lot before I could find him:) Although he was almost asleep, he did seem to see the humor in the situation. What a kook.

As a quick recap, we had a wonderful visit with Bryan's mom. She came into town on the 12th and left on the 17th. Sylvia was pretty unhappy/sick for much of her visit, so it was especially nice to have her here as backup...both for Andrew and for my mental and emotional sanity.

On Saturday, Jessica and I took our girls down to Mineral Point for the Fall Art Tour. It was a glorious day.

I've continued to scan my CD collection to iTunes. I'm really nuts. So far, I have 3,500 songs scanned. I went home last weekend and got a bag of CDs. More MORE ha ha ha ha!!!

I just read a quote I liked a lot: "We write to taste life twice, once in the moment and in retrospection." - Anais Nin

So true. That's a big chunk of why I love to chronicle my kids lives.

I think I had other really pertinent things to report, but they currently escape me. So I'll leave you with the update that Melanie flies in tomorrow. Ben joins her on Friday, and the two of them are staying until mid-day on Monday. We're really looking forward to their visit!

Bryan's a sick boy today. Fever, chills, headache. Hopefully we won't give our disease to our house guests!

**Touching in (2008-10-24 19:07)**



Oct. 24: Bryan and Melanie just drove off to pick up Ben from the airport. Melanie has been here since Wednesday, and we're having a great time! Andrew's been stuck to her like glue. "Doting in idolatry," as Shakespeare might say. The little guy had a wonderful couple of days at preschool, and then he and Mel did a lot of jumping game, book reading, football running in the back yard, puzzles, dancing with scarves, more jumping game, being koalas or foxes or bison or sloths, etc. It's fun to see Andrew enjoy his aunt so much:)

Ben and Melanie are here together now until Monday, so we still have a couple full days to spend together. We're hoping to do an apple orchard outing. Mel, Andrew, and I stopped by a farm stand a couple days back and got five pumpkins, decorative gourds, and (I'm excited about these) a couple big sheaves of corn stalks to make our front entry seasonally festive. With a strand of orange lights, we're ready for Halloween!

**Sylvie is better!! (2008-10-24 19:12)**



Oct. 24: Things are so much better. SO MUCH BETTER! Sylvia is over her ear infection. I took her in to the doctor on Tuesday, and they declared her ears healed. No fluid behind the ear drum. And both those new teeth have cut through the gums. So she has been feeling so much better. She's been happier, smilier...she's even laughing again. But the big news, the news that has rocked my world...she's sleeping again. She's taking naps that last about two hours. Regularly. After about 20 minutes, I listen and brace myself, but she sleeps on and on.

Here's the kicker - last night she didn't wake to nurse all night. I fed her at 11pm and then at 6am. I don't remember getting that much continuous sleep. It may have happened since she was born, but I don't recall such a miraculous event. Oh bliss. Even if it was a one-time thing, I'm happy! And so is my rested girl. And that's what matters most:)

**MP3 conversion complete (mostly) (2008-10-24 19:21)**

Oct. 24: After working on it for weeks, I've completed copying all our CDs to the computer so I can listen to them on our new iPod. We've got 4,300 songs - 15GB. I'll want to do our Christmas music too, but that's all in the basement. Now in my quest to fulfill my obsessive compulsive tendencies, I'm going to spend lots of time tweaking the genres, making sure the album artwork is all there, and making play lists.

We're already having lots of fun re-discovering all our music and listening to lots of things we haven't heard in ages. Thank goodness for Andrew's help through all the CD ripping. He got very good at swapping out CDs, and he'd call out to tell me what track number they were on and how many tracks it had to go. It was a good math experince for the little guy:)

Oh, by the way, Andrew is in love with the iPhone. He plays with Terry's all the time, and he's been having fun with Melanie's too. It's so funny to watch him quickly navigate his way through the screens. The boy knows what he's doing. But one must keep an eye on him to ensure that he doesn't unintentionally make a purchase!

### **Cherokee outing with Dad (2008-10-24 19:33)**



Oct. 24: On October 12, we met Dad for lunch at Rocky's followed by a hike out at Cherokee Marsh. It was stunningly, beautifully perfect. The color! It was the kind of day that superlatives are made for.

Andrew had fun looking for lady bugs and nuts and sticks. He ran and then he wanted to be carried. Dad and Bryan obliged. I had Sylvie in the backpack, and she did a wonderful job. We all walked down to the water and along the boardwalk and then on the path with the big rock and in through the prairie.

I had a fun time taking pictures, and I've got to say, that I'm pretty happy with how this batch turned out. Looking back, I'm glad that we could capture that afternoon and hold on to some of its brilliance.

Thanks, Dad, for spending some fun time with us!

Photos are in the gallery.



### Good times (2008-10-26 12:10)

Oct. 26: Taking a moment here to report that we're having a great time with Ben and Melanie. Plans today include an orchard outing and some pumpkin carving!



### Now entering Facebook (2008-10-28 00:00)

✕ Oct. 28: You'll soon be able to find me on Facebook. That's right, after years of hearing about it, I'm jumping in. Bryan joined a few months ago, and he always seems to know so much about what's going on in our friend's lives. My main hesitation has been that I like to keep my blog up-to-date and I like to read my friend's blogs and my mom/cooking/crafting blogs, and I don't know if I have time in my life for another area of computer time. It's not like the kids often say, "Hey Mom, why don't you just check your email for a bit and we'll play safely and quietly here together." No, they don't say that yet. So I do my computer work during stolen moments here and there. And now I'll add Facebook to my list of things that I'll want to check. So do you want to be my friend!?



### Halloween preview (2008-10-30 07:40)



Oct. 30: I took the kids out yesterday morning to take some photos of them in their sweet Halloween costumes. Granny made Andrew's giraffe costume, and it's just wonderful! Andrew loves the costume, but every time I've pulled out my camera, he immediately takes it off...so no photos have been taken until just now. Sylvia's bear costume is the same type as Andrew's duck costume. He was such a cute duck! And she's a cuddly bear. Hope you all have a happy Halloween tomorrow!

Photos of my kiddos are in the gallery.

### Sylvia's first ice cream (2008-10-30 08:30)

Oct. 30: On October 9, Terry, Andrew, Sylvia, and I went to West Towne Mall together to get some supplies for my new iPod. While we were there, we had some ice cream, and Sylvia joined in - her first ice cream experience!  
[EMBED]

### Waving girl (2008-10-31 00:00)

Oct. 31: Sylvia has been waving for about a month. Here's a video Bryan took on Oct. 5 that shows her doing some waving, and I think you can even hear a little "dadada." All the other noises are Andrew:)

[EMBED]

### **New habit - working out (2008-10-31 08:38)**

✘ Oct. 31: Aside from chasing the kids around, I haven't had a regular work-out routine since I was 8 months pregnant with Andrew. I've recently decided, though, that it's time. After spending well over a month waffling about which gym to join, I signed up with Curves on Monday this week.

So far, so good! I went four times this week, and it worked really well. I get up at 5:50, feed Sylvia, and I'm at Curves by 6:15. It's a half-hour circuit workout and 10 minutes of stretching. That gets me back home just after 7. For the most part, everyone at home is still asleep or just stirring.

I've noticed an increase in my energy levels, and it feels so good to be moving again! My goal will be to go three days a week, but I'm enjoying going every morning so long as I get enough sleep.

Thanks, Melanie, for introducing me to Curves! My wonderful sister-in-law owns a Curves in Texas:)

### **Halloween '08 - trick-or-treating fun (2008-10-31 20:29)**



Oct. 31: It's so fun to have small kids during holidays! Seeing Andrew get so excited that he couldn't sit still...it's really cute. This evening, we went trick-or-treating around our neighborhood - about 10 houses - with Andrew's friends Alivia and Rayna and their parents, Kathy and Brett.

Andrew was leaping about in his adorable giraffe costume. He and Alivia (sort of) took turns ringing door bells and happily requesting candy from our neighbors. It was an amazingly beautiful day today, and while we were trick-or-treating it must have been in the 50s. Wonderful weather! Pictures of the evening are in the gallery.

### **Pumpkin carving (2008-10-31 21:01)**



Oct. 31: I am enjoying a late night of movie-watching and photo-editing, and I've got some good new pictures in the gallery.

While Ben and Melanie were here, we bought and carved some pumpkins. Andrew had a fun time making his by pounding a golf tee into his pumpkin and making star-like holes. Ben, Melanie, and Bryan also made cool ones. This was Andrew's first time carving a pumpkin, and it was fun to watch! Photos are in the gallery.

**Playtime with friends (2008-10-31 21:22)**



Oct. 31: Jessica, Eli, and Celia came over today for a little Halloween playtime. Andrew and Eli didn't have preschool this week because of the statewide teacher's conference, so we got together with Alivia on Thursday and with Eli on Friday. Today we made some Halloween-y play-doh in orange and brown. The boys had fun adding the color and then making cakes and pies and finally taking it outside and scattering it around (!). The weather has been amazing these last couple days, and we're enjoying it 100 %. Jessica and I took lots of pictures of the kids today. You can find them in the gallery!



## 4.11 November

Visiting Mum with the kids (2008-11-01 00:00)



Nov. 1: On Tuesday last week, I took Sylvia and Andrew to Janesville to visit Mum. She'd called me a few times recently - sounding pretty lonely - and she really seemed to appreciate our visit. She marveled at Sylvie and Andrew, and she was in pretty good shape during our visit. Hard to believe she's going to be 90 years old in a few months! Pictures are in the gallery.

[EMBED]

### **Visiting Mum (2008-11-02 00:00)**

**Nov. 2:** On Tuesday, Andrew, Sylvia, and I drove down to Janesville to visit Mum. We had a nice time together. She really enjoyed seeing the kiddos, and she seemed rather overjoyed that I'd come. I think she's feeling pretty lonely. Hard to believe that she'll be 90 years old this winter!

Here's a video I took of her during our visit. Andrew was not interested in participating:)

[EMBED]

### **Splash splash (2008-11-02 00:00)**

**Nov. 2:** Sylvia loves, loves LOVES taking a bath. She laughs, she splashes, she delights in all the water. Amazingly (as compared to her brother), she even thinks that having a cup of water dumped over her head is great fun. She blows bubbles all on her own (she came up with the idea herself), and even when she slips and gets a face full of water she doesn't seem that perturbed. It's so fun to watch her take a bath!

If you need a little happy therapy, come on over for Sylvie's bath time!

[EMBED]



**The things he says! (2008-11-02 11:39)**



Nov. 2: Behold! A new installment of the cute things that Andrew says. I've got a couple notebooks where I jot these things down, and the time has come to share them. This boy... He's something else. And so sweet and snuggly. I really love him. So now without further ado..

Andrew: "Mommy, guess what!! (as he runs down the hall, leaping into the air like a gleeful leprechaun)

Mom "What is it, Andrew?"

Andrew: (as he pulls his pants up to his knees). "I'm getting hair on my legs!! I'm getting to be a big daddy!"

After preschool, Andrew flew from the playground and gave Aunt Melanie a leaping-hug...

Andrew: I missed you for five days while I was at preschool! I can't even BELIEVE it!

(and later, throughout Aunt Mel's visit)

Andrew: "I love you so much, I can't even BELIEVE it!"

or

Andrew: "You're the SWEETEST Aunt Mel in the whole world."

As we are driving in the car, Andrew channeled the book "Guess How Much I Love You"

Andrew: "I like you to the sun. I like you as much as the bushes! I like you as high as the pavement!"

After giving him a cup of yummy cider

Andrew: "Thanks for giving me some apple cider, Mommy. Dat was just what I wanted."

While folding laundry on my bed

Mom: "Andrew-man, please don't hop on the bed."

Andrew: (while bouncing up and down) "I'm not hopping, Mom. I'm jumping!"

While we were at the Windsor Cemetery visiting my mom's grave one beautiful fall afternoon

Andrew: "Grandma Margot died. She's buried in there (pointing at the ground). (pause) I wish she were here. I miss Grandma Margot.

(pause) I bet Grandpa misses her."

and later

Andrew: "I wish Grandma Margot didn't die."

While driving, Andrew is coo-ing and goo-ing and being silly with Sylvia...

Andrew: "Mommy, I like you. I like Sylvia too. (pause) I like Sylvie better than you."

Mom: "I'm glad you like your sister so much."

Andrew: "I love her. She's so SWEET!"

Finally, not something Andrew said, but a snippet of a conversation I had with Jessica that really cracked me up. I think it demonstrates how even boys who love their little sisters can be too aggressive sometimes. And how much it can help to have a friend to talk (and then laugh) about it!

Me: "Andrew bit Sylvia today. Hard. He left teeth marks."

Jessica: "Ouch! What did you do about that? (pause) I ask because Eli hit Celia over the head with a fire truck."

These kids are just too much!

### **A poem for today (2008-11-04 07:56)**

Just

by Alan Shapiro

after the downpour, in the early evening,  
late sunlight glinting off the raindrops sliding  
down the broad backs of the redbud leaves  
beside the porch, beyond the railing, each leaf  
bending and springing back and bending again  
beneath the dripping,  
between existences,  
ecstatic, the souls grow mischievous, they break ranks,  
swerve from the rigid V's of their migration,  
their iron destinies, down to the leaves  
they flutter in among, rising and settling,  
bodiless, but pretending to have bodies,

their weightlessness more weightless for the ruse,  
their freedom freer, their as-ifs nearly not,  
until the night falls like an order and  
they rise on one vast wing that darkens down  
the endless flyways into other bodies.

Nothing will make you less afraid.

Anne sent me this poem on Mom's birthday this year, and I just ran across it in a mad attempt to organize my gmail inbox. I've really enjoyed watching the geese fly low over our home recently. Always makes me think of my mom.

**Voted! (2008-11-04 13:39)**



Nov. 4: I am so excited that election day is here! I find myself feeling very hopeful that for both state and national politics, a new, more reasonable era is approaching. For the sake of my kids, I certainly hope so! I took Andrew and Sylvia to the polling booth this afternoon. Andrew was super sleepy, so he requested a ride in the Ergo, and I carried Sylvia. They can both say they were right there while I helped make history:) Sylvia nearly pulled an extension cord out of the wall...glad we didn't nearly cause major voting problems! There was no one in line (and in fact no one but me voting) when I went in at 2pm. And now? Now my house is insanely quiet. For the first time in AGES, both kids are sleeping during the day. It's been nearly a half hour. BLISS!

I'm shopping for Christmas cards:) Check these beautiful cards out! Were I rich, I would do something like this. Update: Before hitting send, Sylvia woke up. She's now crying in her crib. Why so much not sleeping, dear Sylvie???

## Dirt eater (2008-11-04 15:53)

Nov. 4: I know this is going to deeply call into question my standards and parenting morals, but I couldn't resist sharing this clip of Sylvia.

[EMBED] I can just hear her in 10 years: "Mother, I CANNOT believe that you let me eat dirt." "I cannot believe that you took pictures of me eating dirt instead of stopping me as any sane mother would do." "I cannot believe that you published photos and VIDEO of me eating dirt to the internet for all the world to see." "If I run for elected office in 20 years, you just know that this is going to surface and incite a scandal." Me: "Aaawww, but Sylvie, just looks at what a cute dirt eater you were!"



A mama's gotta share all that good baby-dirt-mouth love! Besides, maybe your affinity for dirt keeps you healthy!  
<http://medjournalwatch.blogspot.com/2007/05/dirt-is-good-for-your-child.html>

Getting at the heart of the matter (2008-11-06 09:05)



Nov. 6: Heather sent me the following quote. I find it to be so true, that upon reading it for the sixth time, I'm crying. I think this puts into words a little of the philosophy that guides my life. It's how Mom taught us to look at life, and it's so central to my approach to being a mother.

The things that matter most in our lives are not fantastic or grand. They are moments when we touch one another, when we are there in the most attentive or caring way. This simple and profound intimacy is the love that we all long for. These moments of touching and being touched can become a foundation for a path with heart, and they take place in the most immediate and direct way. Mother Teresa put it like this: "In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."

- Jack Kornfield from A Path with Heart; excerpted in Love and Gratitude

### **Clumsy (2008-11-07 08:33)**

Nov. 7: Andrew is at preschool and Sylvia is blessedly napping, so I thought this would be a good opportunity to share a personally deprecating story.

Last night I had hooked up my laptop to my external hard drive to work on some old photos. Forgetting that it was plugged in (with a very short cord), I stood up with the laptop and began walking. The cord quickly stopped me. The laptop flew from my hands, smashed into my shin, and hit the ground. Fortunately, the laptop and the external hard drive both came away unscathed. I wasn't quite so lucky.

I got a gash on my leg that quickly started swelling up like a goose egg. I was nearly in tears (OK, I was in tears), and Bryan couldn't figure out what had happened. "From the laptop?" he questioned. I was moaning in pain and hobbling around to check to make sure the computer was alright, and Bryan was sort of questioning my fortitude. "I don't need your pity," I said, "but I could do without the demeaning comments." (Note: Bryan is one of the kindest, most loving people I know. And I tend to be pretty tough. The fact that I was moaning over a bump with my laptop did seem a little absurd.)

Well, when he got a look at my leg, he ran to get me ice, helped me elevate my leg, and held the ice on it. That was about the time that shock set in.

I kid you not, my teeth were chattering, and I had a couple blankets on. I couldn't stop laughing because the whole thing was so ridiculous. I imagined going into the emergency room and trying to explain that, no, I hadn't walloped myself with a crowbar. Somehow I had kicked a falling laptop with my shin.

After an hour, it felt better, so we went to bed with my leg elevated on pillows. It feels fine this morning. Looks kinda nasty, but at least it's winter now, so no one needs to see my legs.

I'm happy to find that my laptop is in fully functioning order. Just one of those crazy things.

### **Michael has a job! (2008-11-10 19:28)**

Nov. 11: I'm quite excited to report that my dear brother Michael has secured employment. Since Excel Inns was purchased and the home office closed in April, Michael has been on the job hunt. He called me today sounding rather elated and told me that he had gotten a job offer from Lands End. He'll be commuting down to Dodgeville for work. I don't know exactly what he'll be doing, but I'm sure it has something to do with making computers work correctly:)

Yay Bubs!

### **Train trip (2008-11-11 15:58)**

Nov. 11: To celebrate Sylvia's 9-month birthday, she and I took a train ride from St. Paul home. Now she's done something before her brother - a train trip! She was a rather noisy girl, shrieking regularly whether happy or sad,



and I was fretting about waking all our fellow passengers (many of whom had been on the train since Seattle). After a bout of shrieking, I turned to a somewhat intimidating man seated across the aisle from me and I apologized for Sylvia's volume. "No problem," he said. This steel construction worker went on to tell me about how he and his wife had a very hard time having children. When they finally did, he said, he learned to appreciate every sound the little ones make as a miracle - happy or sad. He said she had a beautiful voice.

Well that certainly turned my morning around. I'd been getting frustrated with the wee girl, but it was mostly because of worries about my fellow travelers. Since he was so generous with his compassion, I looked around and saw that only one or two people didn't have plainly sympathetic looks on their faces. I ended up passing Sylvia over to a couple passengers who I don't think I would have ever interacted with had we not shared a train car. Sylvia loved getting to smile and goo at a new face, and her sweetness certainly brightened a few moments of their day. Plus I got a few minutes off from walking with her...up and down and up and downandupanddown the train car.

I had a wonderful visit with Maretta, and a good two-day Alumni Adventures meeting at Carleton. Maretta and I had fun on Saturday shopping around on Grand Avenue. She watched Sylvie during my meetings in Northfield, and then I came back to her place on Monday night so I could catch the train on Tuesday.

I took the train because I sold my car (!!!) to Maretta's friend. Hooray!

OK, shrieking girl calls.

### **Amazing Andrew (2008-11-12 22:02)**

Nov. 12: It's good to be back home again! The kids and I had a good time being back in a normal routine today. We had story hour and Sylvia's 9-month doctor's appointment, and then we had Terry and Tom over for dinner. Unfortunately, in the mid-afternoon I developed a killer headache. Sylvia was napping, and as I swallowed some pills and curled up in bed, I told Andrew he could do anything he wanted as long as it didn't involve waking me or Sylvia. When I came-to 45 minutes later, my head ache had cleared (thank goodness!).

I walked into the kitchen, and there on the counter were all the clean dishes from the dishwasher. I was amazed! Andrew had used his "free time" to unload the dishwasher! My heart melted a little more when I saw that he had also loaded the dirty breakfast dishes in the dishwasher. He'd done it so carefully. What a boy. I can't believe he did that. My little three-year-old baby is getting to be so big! He's one of the neatest people I know:)

**She's getting to be so big! (2008-11-14 10:34)**



Nov. 14: Sylvia is getting more advanced by the day. She's pulling up to standing on anything she can reach, and she reaches waaaaay up to try to find things to pull down (on top of herself). At her 9-month doctor's appointment this week, she weighed in at 18 lbs, 1 oz and measured 28" long. That put her in the 30th percentile for weight and the 70th percentile for height. She's a long-limbed girl right now!

One of her most defining characteristics this past month has been her screech. She does it all the time. LOUDLY. Like a police whistle. It stops conversations in crowded rooms. She does it when she's unhappy, she does it when she's glad, she does it constantly when in her high chair. I say over and over and over "Sylvia, that's Too Loud." Then I try to show her the baby sign language for what I think she wants (up, down, more, all done, take-my-bother's-toy, etc.) I'm hoping it's a phase. Maybe when she learns how to talk, the screeching will decrease in frequency or volume. There's always hope!

I'm hoping to get a video soon of one of Sylvia's new tricks - blowing raspberries. She puckers her mouth up and blows. And she loves it when I do it back at her. Such a fun girl!

In other news, she'll now let me read 2-3 pages of a book to her. We're working it into the bedtime routine, and the book reading is now seeming to be accepted!

OK, I'm off to pick up Andrew from preschool. Have a great weekend!

## Sylvia's cutenesses (2008-11-21 09:00)



Nov. 21: I've been intending to post about some of the adorable things Sylvia has been doing, but she hasn't been napping for much over a half hour recently. That doesn't give a mom much time to be on the computer:) And it kinda makes for a grouchy, over-tired baby. But enough of that! She's so sweet, so adorable, and growing so fast! Here are some of the cute things that Sylvia has been doing these days that make us smile and melt our hearts.

- Sharing food: In the last week, Sylvia has discovered the great fun of sharing her food. She offers up a bit of cracker or mashed fruit or whatever happens to be on her tray. If I lean in and nibble at it, saying, "Mmmmm!!! So goooood!" she grins hugely, gets all squirmy, and chuckles with delight. Then my insides get all mushy because Sylvia's chuckle is just so life-affirming:)
- Sylvia has had a soft pink blanket-dog that she's been sleeping with since she was tiny. When she was really little, she loved to have it draped over her face while she slept (she wasn't so in to the SIDS recommendations of avoiding soft items in the crib). In recent weeks, "poodle nose" has gone from being something we hand her to help her fall asleep to becoming something she is really attached to. She grabs for it when she wakes up, its familiar presence helps her fall asleep, and these days when she wakes up happy (a rarity), she holds up Poodle Nose to me to greet. It's like, "Hey, Mom, give Poodle Nose a kiss too!" Andrew never really developed an affection for a toy, so this is kind of fun and new for me!
- Tubby time is Sylvia's favorite part of the day. She loves it. She vibrates with excitement. When I took a shower this morning, she spent the whole time screeching at me and trying to work her way through the shower curtain

so she could get in too. When we say that it's tubby time, she crawls after us into the bathroom. Then she pulls herself up on the edge of the tub and talks animatedly about how she can't wait to get in the water. Bryan discovered that undressing her while she's standing there means that there is no crying, and it's so cute the way that she helps us take her clothes off. This little 9-month-old girl is stepping out out of her pants when we pull them down. Seeing her tiny little feet pull up out of the pant legs, one after the other, is so very very adorable. I took a video:) When she's in the tub, much laughter and splashing ensues. Especially if Big Brother joins her. She loves those nights. She hasn't ever minded getting water on her face, and she's blowing bubbles in the water all on her own. It makes her quite happy. These days, we get her in her PJs, read her two stories, and nurse her before laying her down for bed. For the most part, she goes right to sleep.

- No description of Sylvia's activities would be complete without mentioning The Screech. It's loud. And she does it a lot. A Lot. It's like a police whistle. Piercing. Sustained. Numbing all other thought. I believe that it's decreasing in its frequency. At this point she mostly screeches during meals (when she wants more, is all done, isn't thrilled with the menu or the service or the ambiance) or when Andrew is preventing her from doing something she wants.
- I'm a little worried about our plane trip next week. Andrew was such a mellow, well, person. So travel with him has been pretty easy. There were times developmentally when he's been harder or easier, but in general, you show him books, feed him, or bring a few toys and he is all set. With Sylvia, I'm thinking...not so much... She really isn't too into toys. Books make her mad. What she likes to do is interact with people, crawl around, pull things out (that's a really big developmental stage she's in right now), interact with people, crawl around, etc. I'm hoping that peek-a-boo can entertain her for a long time. She LOVES that game. Hoping that we don't end up with a lot of screeching. And/or that the "fasten seatbelt" sign is not illuminated for a good stretch of the flight. As we learned on our train trip, she really enjoys having me walk her up and down the aisle. On the other hand, if she doesn't do well, that's fine too. It's not that long of a flight!

So that's a snapshot of some of Sylvia's activities these days. I can't wait to go to Texas to share her fun-ness with Bryan's family!

Argh (2008-11-21 13:32)



Nov. 21: Sylvia isn't taking her afternoon nap. I can't convince her. After trying to get her down for a half hour, she was quiet for about 10 minutes, so I started a post about sleep. Then she started crying, so I went in again to try to quiet her. The girl was practically bouncing up and down. Resigned to the idea of no afternoon nap (which means that in a couple hours things are going to be pretty unhappy around here), I came out to see that Andrew had closed all the windows on my computer. Post gone.

Not only that, but I'm feeling slightly less than friendly toward my little man because he threw an all-out tantrum as our friends were leaving from a play-date this afternoon. He wanted to watch a DVD. He was climbing the walls and wailing as we were trying to say goodbye. It wasn't cool. Not behavior I expect from a three-year-old Andrew. So I'm feeling rather peeved by Andrew and baffled by Sylvia. And I have no post on sleep except to say that I wish she would sleep more. Maybe we can all just take a nice two-hour nap this afternoon. Then we'd all be in a better mood!

Addition: After writing this, I discovered that the pack 'n play that I had offered to loan to Heather for the week is still up in St. Paul at Maretta's house. I realized this as her dad was on his way over to pick it up! Fortunately, my friend Pam had an extra one at her house. So around 3:30, I packed both my grouchy kids and my grouchy self into the car. We drove to Pam's house - Sylvia fell asleep. We drove to Heather's house - Andrew fell asleep. I drove through the country watching the geese fly low in formation as the sun set in a sherbet of color while listening to NPR. Sleep for the little ones and a little restoration for me. Turned out to be a pretty good afternoon. I think it was a good thing that I had to do the pack 'n play shuffle:)

### A little song (2008-11-21 20:16)

Nov. 21: For your listening pleasure, here are Andrew and Bryan with "A, B, C"  
[EMBED]

### Temperment (2008-11-22 00:00)



Nov. 21: It is so interesting to start to get a real sense for Sylvia's growing temperament. I'm very hesitant in general to put labels on people because I think it can be limiting. I don't want to pigeon-hole my kids, and I don't want to come to any conclusions about their temperament that could change the way I interact with them and inadvertently push them into some kind of mold. That said, I spend a lot of time thinking about their growing personalities, and I think I can safely make some statements about the way they are today. Not to say that it won't change next week, but some things about those two are very true for them right now.

For example:

The other night when Terry, Tom, my dad, Michael, and Lisa came over for supper, we were talking about Andrew. Terry said that if he had to describe him in two words it would be strong-willed and meticulous. Other words that I can think of for him are organized, imaginative, self-assured, bouncy, focused, contemplative, kind, determined, mellow, and loving. (By the way, if anyone ever wants to play "Describe your child," I'm in! I've discovered that I love hearing other people think about my kids in this way!! Add your own thoughts to the comments here if you'd like to join in right now:)

Sylvia is a very different little person. For example, I would not describe her as mellow. Spirited seems more



up her alley. And joyful. Energetic, spunky, engaging. She's got some fierceness in her that she expresses by loving things intensely or being extremely displeased when things don't go her way. And while Andrew can certainly be strong-willed at times, I'd give that adjective more to Sylvia. She has a lot of wonder...it's so nice to watch her sit in the yard and stare at the trees and plants for hours. She is strongly tuned-in to the people around her. And she loves faces. Would that be described as personable? The other night, Lisa described Sylvie as spontaneous and spirited. I'd add boisterous to her list.

And I'd go on, but she just woke up from her nap! Coming, my little free-spirit!

### **My favorite things about going to the gym (2008-11-23 00:00)**

The logo for Curves gym, featuring the word "Curves" in a purple, cursive font.

Nov. 23: I've been going to Curves gym now for about a month, and it's going really well. I've been going three or four days each week at 6am, and I'm home by 7am. The work-out gets my heart-rate up, and it gives me a lot of energy, but I have yet to feel sore or do much sweating. [That's in serious contrast to my time at Monkey Bar gym which I loved, but which leaves you unable to climb stairs, lift a coffee cup to your mouth, or get up from a chair while you're getting started!]

Here are my favorite things about going to the gym:

1. Listening to NPR in the car. I can never listen to the radio. I get almost no news. But now I'm getting about 15 minutes of Morning Edition and I feel more keyed into world happenings.
2. Being on my own for 50 minutes each day. As I'm doing my circuit at Curves, I don't have to worry about anyone else's needs. And no one is going to cry for me, so I can let the part of my being that responds to my children take a breather for an hour. It's pure bliss.
3. Coming home to my snuggly family. Often when I get home, Bryan and both kids are in the bed. And it's dark. And they're all so cozy! I can crawl back into bed and have Andrew wrap himself around me in his sweet, warm sleepiness and say, "How was the gym, Mom?" and then "Do you remember any of the dreams you had last night?" Sylvia is all smiles and gurgles and morning mama love. And I'm awake enough to appreciate it all. It's good.
4. More energy. I've noticed that on days I go to the gym I can go, go, go more easily than on days I don't. I still don't totally understand how by getting up an hour earlier and exercising I end up with more energy, but I do. So that's a good thing
5. Getting fit? A sub-goal of this whole endeavor. I like taking action to bring a little tone back to this mama-bod.

So far, I'm really happy with my membership with Curves. Hoping it continues to be a fun thing to do!

## Raspberries (2008-11-23 00:00)

Nov. 23: Sylvia has been having a good time puckering up her lips and blowing "raspberries." She loves it when we do it back at her. Here Bryan caught her (and Andrew) demonstrating this new trick on video.

[EMBED]

## Sleep (2008-11-24 00:00)



Nov. 24: Sleep has been rough for my dear Sylvia. My assessment of the situation is that she doesn't want to miss the party. She tends to go down for her naps alright, but then she wakes up after a half hour or an hour. She wakes up crying, and while she can barely keep her eyes open, she wildly moves her body in an attempt to keep herself up. I try nursing her back to sleep, rubbing her back, singing to her, shushing her, rocking her, etc. No go. I try leaving her to cry but checking on her every five minutes to soothe her. No go. I try leaving her to cry for a half hour straight. No go.

She knows her mind, this girl. And when she makes up her mind about something, she's not one to be moved. When she was little she didn't like her car seat and had an extraordinary ability to make her disdain known...crying up to hours at a time. I hold my breath when I think about how this determination may manifest itself in an 18-month old or a 2 1/2 year old!

In an ongoing attempt to find a sage who can help me lull my little girl into naptime dreamlands, I recently checked out about 10 sleep books from the library. It's amazing how much some of these authors oppose each other. It's like the Force vs. the Dark Side. Attachment parenting vs. Sleep training. It makes it a little daunting when they both threaten how ineffective and harmful the others' approach can be.

For myself, I think I've developed a hybrid.

I think that new babies should get whatever they want. If parenting is a dance, then those first couple or few months, I've been really happy letting my babies do the leading. Then around three months through like six months, my little babies have seemed sturdier, and needs have started shifting to wants. Rhythms are established, and routines can start to be instituted. It was around this point, that we started Andrew on his nighttime routine, which we keep to this day. Then as the tiny baby gets older...up to a year or more...it seems like more and more of the leading of the parenting dance should be done by the parent. When my babies get to decide too much, they end up not being very happy. Being a good leader means paying a lot of attention to your partner, but you're the one deciding where to go and when. My kids do well when they know they don't have to worry about who is in charge. They know it's me. They can test me (oh, they test me!), but I think they are relieved to find that the boundaries of their world are strong and consistent.

The sleep books talk about a lot of different sleep topics, like with sleeping through the night. Sure I would LOVE to sleep through the night, but it really isn't too big of a deal to me that Sylvia is still waking once or twice. When she wakes three or more times, it's a big deal. If she's still waking once or twice in three or four or five months, I may feel like it's become unacceptable...but it's a transition. I like it best when it's a smooth transition.

The main techniques that I'm picking up on from across all the books are:

- Consistency helps/is critical to sleeping success
- Having a winding-down routine is a really good thing
- Sleep begets sleep. A baby who naps well will sleep better at night and will nap better the next day.
- Sleep is critical to growth and development. Knowing that Sylvia is chronically sleep-deprived, it pains me to read about all the long-term problems with sleep deprived babies: ADHD, depression, obesity, strongly depressed academic performance, hangnails, etc.
- Having the baby eat after waking up, having a period of wakefulness and then a nap (without nursing first) seems to be a common recommendation if you're looking for longer naps. I am.
- Whether following the clock, your baby's cues, or a little of both, having a consistent routine helps

Yup, that's it. But nobody can really tell me what to do when Sylvia wakes up after a half hour nap screaming and won't go back down. Oh well. She'll grow out of it eventually!

So that's my stream-of-consciousness brain dump on sleep.

Good night!

**Snowy, feverish morning (2008-11-24 09:14)**



Nov. 24: We woke up to a beautifully snowy neighborhood. Each twig on each branch of each tree is etched in snow. It's beautiful.

It was nice to wake up to a beautiful sight, because last night was not a good one. Sylvia spiked a fever last night after she went to bed, and she was up (I think) every 45 minutes or so all night long. Bryan did some long stretches with her, we brought her into bed with us, and in general, we tried to do everything we could to ease her pain. Poor girl. I think this may be teething related, but we'll see. If she recovers by the end of the day, we'll chock it up to one of the two teeth that are coming through. Otherwise, we may have a sickly girl on our hands. Andrew was blowing his nose this morning too...

Also, Andrew has something he wanted to add:

"Daddy, it snowed. Daddy, are you thinking that you see snow at your work? Yes. I do. Daddy, I like you. Daddy, Andrew, Mommy."

**We made it! (2008-11-25 18:51)**

Nov. 25: We're happily writing to you from Texas. It's calm, it's relaxing. And our day of travel wasn't bad. Sylvia did very well. She only cried for a few minutes here and there (once when the arm rest fell and clonked her on the head). Andrew's a rock as a traveler.

And now I'm off to Walgreens to purchase new toiletries. Oops.

Happy Thanksgiving!

**The Silent Screech (2008-11-26 10:48)**



Nov. 26: Sylvia is a sick girl. She was up most of the night on Sunday and Monday nights...two teeth were coming in, and she was one very unhappy camper. She's now the proud owner of a top left front tooth. She's also almost got a forth tooth on the bottom. Once that comes all the way through, she'll be up to six teeth. She started running a fever on Sunday night. Between that and a runny nose, I thought she just had teething side-effects. However yesterday Andrew got a runny nose, and during our travels yesterday, Sylvia lost her voice. She's in good spirits, but now she has a cough and lots of nose-running. And no scream. This morning she fell and bonked her head, but when she went to scream and screech, nothing came out. Silence. Short "waahh waaahhh" <silent scream> quiet "wahhhhh wwaaaaaahhh" <silent screech> I couldn't help but smile a little in relief. When we had breakfast this morning and she tried to screech in protest at the slowness of the service, no sound came out. She can still babble and goo, but her upper register has been temporarily put out of order by her cold. I'm trying not to enjoy it too much. That would be mean:)

**Photos up (2008-11-26 11:13)**

Nov. 26: For reasons not clear even to me, I have not spent the last hour outdoors enjoying some beautiful Texan weather. Instead I've been catching up on photo editing and uploading. It's an obsession, I tell you!



Anyway, the result is that there are now photos from throughout November in the gallery. Enjoy!  
Nov. 1-21 and Nov. 22-25.

### **Happy Thanksgiving! (2008-11-27 15:08)**

Nov. 27: We've finished an amazing Thanksgiving feast created by LuAnn. MmmmMMmmm good. Sylvia really enjoyed the food - especially the pumpkin pie!

Here's a video of the kids on this fun holiday.

[EMBED] Andrew's poem (from preschool) goes: "The turkey is a funny bird, his head goes wobble wobble. And just one thing he says is gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble!" Happy Thanksgiving!

## **4.12 December**

### **Thanksgiving visit recap (2008-12-01 00:00)**



Dec. 1: We're heading home today. It's been a wonderful visit. Andrew just adores everyone here, and Sylvia had a great time exploring and expanding her skill-set (she's learned how to walk while pushing a small chair!). As you might guess, I took more than just a few (OK, 300) pictures while we were here. A narrowed down, but still substantial set are in the gallery.



The weather was often in the 60s or 70s...today a north wind kicked in and chilled it down a bit. We took a nice walk at a nearby forest earlier in the week. Andrew played nearly constantly with Melanie or Grandad or Ben or Granny. He especially liked the Lincoln Logs, Grandad's animals, and the great 1970s Fisher Price toys.

Granny provided several amazing meals. Thanksgiving dinner was amazing. Then we also had a lasagna (Mom's recipe) and fettucini alfredo dinner. Last night, we did Mexican buffet, with tostadas, nachos, and soft tacos. Yum, yum! Sylvia loved everything. She's willing to eat just about everything so long as she can gum it!

We played a poker tournament, and we all had fun trying out Mark's new crokinole board. He learned how to play with his grandad when he was a little boy, and we all enjoyed flicking the disks across the board. Some more than others...I was a relatively terrible player:)

Sylvia started pointing at things this week. When we ask her where Ginger the horse is, she looks at it and points! Photos of her riding Ginger are in the gallery. Too cute!

The kids are both on the tail-end of being sick, but unfortunately we passed their cold on to their grandparents. They seem to be only mildly affected, though, so that's a good thing. Sick kids can get everyone sick!

We're supposed to be home by 9pm tonight, so I hope all our travel goes well. Now, it's Christmas time!

### **New family photos (2008-12-02 00:00)**

Dec. 2: While we were in Texas, we had some family photos taken. The last ones we had done were when Andrew was (exactly) Sylvia's age. A very narrowed-down selection are in the gallery.



**We're home again! (2008-12-02 09:30)**



Dec. 2: Ahh, home again. Andrew bundled up in his snow gear this morning and tromped around our yard, making tracks in the snow. Our flight home yesterday was smooth. Sylvia only had a few crying moments, and Andrew was again as good as good can be. That said, traveling is tiring in general, and with two little ones it's more than slightly exhausting. Bryan and I were both dragging by the time we met my dad at the airport.

We're enjoying a quiet day at home. Sylvia woke up from her nap after 40 minutes, so I've decided to let her cry until she falls back asleep. She's currently not very happy with this decision.

Andrew and I played his new Sequence for Kids game, and he's now playing with his basket of animals, all curled next to me in blankets on the sofa.

The photo here is one I considered for our Christmas card since it captures a certain element of our life right now, but decided I'd go with something a little more calm instead:)

Post-preschool quotes (2008-12-04 12:48)



Dec. 4: In the two hours since Andrew returned home from preschool, he's uttered a handful of memorable phrases. For example:

- As we were leaving the playground, Andrew: "How much did you and Sylvia miss me while I was at preschool?"  
Me: "Sooo much! Sylvia kept saying, 'Where is Big Brother, I miss him so much? When will he come home again?'" Andrew to Sylvia: (grinning from ear to ear) "It's alright now, Sylvia, I'm back! I haven't given her a kiss yet, Mom. Can you bend down so I can kiss her yiddle head?"
- When we got home, Andrew discovered that I'd put up all the Christmas decorations. He was running around the house admiring them all and wanted to try his favorite, a wooden Santa music box. "Oh, Mom! It's so beautiful!"
- Andrew requested a peanut butter and jelly sandwich (big shocker there) for lunch today. I made Sylvia and myself some noodles. That was a mistake, because of course then Andrew wanted noodles too. So I told him that if he finished all his sandwich, I would make him some noodles. He didn't like that plan. He suggested

that he put his (mangled) sandwich in the refrigerator, "for later" and have noodles now. After trying several other angles, he laid his head down on his arms and sobbed. Must be tired from school today. Through his sobs, he choked out that I "wasn't talking very nicely to him." Apparently saying, "Honey, I understand that you really want noodles. If you finish all your sandwich including the crusts, I'll make you some." doesn't count as speaking nicely:)

- After our tearful lunch, I went to put Sylvia down for her nap. Andrew was helping me rip our Christmas CDs onto the computer. He loves to help with that and can do it all on his own. I'd only been nursing Sylvia for a few moments when I hear, "Help helphelp HELP help help HELP HELP!! MOMMY! HELP!" I jump with Sylvia (sort of expecting to find his finger stuck in the computer, given the frantic-ness of his cries), and come out to find an utterly distraught Andrew looking at the computer screen and crying and nearly hyperventilating. I've seen such behavior in adults before when computers don't work well, but I wasn't very pleased with him for having me jump up with Sylvia (thereby completely messing up her going-down-for-a-nap cycle). I told him I'd help him when I was done putting Sylvia down, and he continued to dramatically cry at the computer for about five minutes saying things like, "Help, oh please oh please help me!!! Oh no, Mommy help helphelphelp helpmehelpmehelpmehelpmehelpme!!!" Sylvia was so intrigued by the dramatics occurring in the next room that she wouldn't settle down for her nap. So I came out to find out what was wrong. Turns out that the songs were being alphabetized by name instead of track number so the track numbers were all out of order. Makes me shake my head to think back on how completely that FREAKED HIM OUT.

Andrew's now taking a nap. Sylvia isn't. She's crying sporadically as she tries to help herself fall asleep. Oh, wait, a moment of silence. Sweet, sweet silence. I daren't check on them both for fear that it will wake them!

PS. They've been sleeping for an hour!!

And I just remembered another Andrew quote. This morning during breakfast, Andrew was admiring his pajamas. "Those pjs are from Grandma Margot," I told him. "She got you those for your second birthday." A look of delight appeared on Andrew's face, he hugged himself and then waved his arms in the air, "I LOVE Grandma Margot!!," he said.

### Waffles of yumminess (2008-12-05 08:55)



Dec. 5: Sylvia has been sleeping for about 40 minutes. We'll see if she can make it past the 45 minute wake-up. The other day, I let her cry for an hour after both her morning and afternoon naps after she woke at the 45 minute mark. The next day, she took an hour-and-a-half nap...and then a 45 minuter.

But maybe, just maybe we're making progress.

She sure was grumpy this morning. She didn't want me to put her down. When I got dressed, I laid her on the bed when she sobbed until I picked her up again. Then when I put in my contacts I laid her down on the floor where she sobbed until I picked her up again. I think it was just a must-be-held kind of morning.

Anyway, the purpose of this post is to share a wonderful recipe with you, not to again regale you with the details of my girl-child's sleeping schedule.

Jessica just asked me for my overnight, yeasty waffle recipe, and since I typed out to send to her, I thought I would share it with you all. It's so good. I love these waffles. My tummy is rumbling for them right now. Take my word for them. Make the batter tonight and eat them for breakfast in the morning. If you really don't like the idea of separating the eggs and beating the egg whites, you can skip that step and they'll still be good. Mmmm mmmm

#### Overnight Waffles

from: Mark Bittman's, How To Cook Everything

#### Ingredients

1/2 teaspoon Instant yeast

2 cups all purpose flour

1 tablespoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 cups milk

8 tablespoon butter melted and cooled

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

2 eggs

Oil for brushing on waffle iron

Before going to bed, combine the dry ingredients and stir in the milk, then the butter and vanilla. The mixture will be loose. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside overnight at room temperature.

Brush the waffle iron lightly with oil and preheat it. Separate the eggs and stir the yolks into the batter. Beat the whites until they hold soft peaks. Stir them gently into the batter.

Pour batter onto the waffle iron and bake until the waffle is done, usually 3 to 5 minutes, depending on your iron. Serve immediately or keep warm for a few minutes in a low oven.

Note: This recipe is supposed to serve four, but, er, it feeds me

and Bryan and Andrew with maybe one left over (assuming we don't have sausage or eggs or anything extra). When we have friends over, we make a double batch. They freeze well. A quick toast in the toaster oven crisps them up again.

#### **Vote now for the Christmas card photo (2008-12-05 08:59)**

Dec. 5: I can't decide! Which photo should I enclose in this year's Christmas card? I am planning on this one:






But then I think, "No, do something more fun, more memorable!"  
This one will make people smile:



Thoughts? Suggestions? Votes? I think I'll order them tonight.

### **Terry's adventures (2008-12-06 00:00)**

 Dec. 5: As part of his now-retired lifestyle, Terry's been taking some long driving trips. He just left for a two-month trip out west (some of which will be spent with his family in Oregon). Michael set Terry up with a website so he can share stories and photos from his travels. Thought you might like to check it out!  
It's an easy website to remember: [terryhaller.com](http://terryhaller.com)

## The baby clothes-go-round (2008-12-06 08:52)



Dec. 6: Sylvia will be 10 months old next week. Can you believe it? She's started "walking" by pushing a chair across the room. She is so proud of herself. It's fun to see. Sylvia loves it when people clap and cheer for her. But she doesn't like it when things she wants to do don't work. Right now, she has a very low tolerance for things not working right. And not a lot of persistence. BUT her screech went away when she lost her voice, and it hasn't come back yet. It's a real relief. I'm losing a lot less brain cells this way.

Sylvia has long arms, and most of her 6-12 month shirts are starting to have 3/4 length sleeves. So this morning I put away most of her short sleeved shirts, and all of her warm-weather 6-12 month clothes. That left her dresser a bit bare. But never fear! I went down into the basement and unpacked a big tub of 12 month clothes. It was so fun to pull out all those sweet baby clothes that either were Andrew's or I bought before she was born or friends have given to us. So many sweet things. Such cute winter wear. They're all in the wash right now, and I can't wait to start incorporating her new shirts and jumpers and overalls into her wardrobe. I LOVE baby clothes. Love love love. It's a genetic thing.

**Sleep. Sweet, sweet sleep (2008-12-06 13:21)**



Dec. 6: We've turned a corner in Sylvia's short-napping world. It's been wonderful. Earlier this week, I again decided to put my foot down on the waking after 45 minutes shenanigans. I went in to check on her right away and then set the timer for 60 minutes. After an hour, she was still crying, so I went in and got her up. Then again for her afternoon nap, I checked on her right when she woke up and tried to soothe her. Then I left and set the timer for 60 minutes and got my still-crying girl when it went off.

Previously, I'd set the timer for 5 or 15 or 20 or 40 minutes (I have to use the timer, or I just go in because she's calling for me for heaven's sakes. Then I can't not pick her up, and then it's all over). And all of those seemed kind of heartless and horrible. I often give her 20 minutes to try to settle herself down to take the second half of her nap. Having me in the room only seems to make her more mad.

I was worried that I'd have to increase the crying times to over an hour the next day, but to my great relief, she slept for a bit over an hour. Most (but not all) naps this week have been over an hour. Often an hour and a half. And Sylvia is so happy afterward. She'll play by herself, she won't cry when she bonks her head, she has some patience while I'm getting her food. If I'd only known that letting her cry for two hours one day would eliminate hours of crying on other days, I would have done this months ago.

Who knows if it's permanent, but I wanted to write this down so I remember next time what worked in the past.

If my girl slept longer and was therefore happier and less easy to anger, oh what a wonderful world this would be!

### **First word...and another tooth! (2008-12-08 19:32)**

Dec. 8: Sylvia has been saying "mmaahh mmaahh mmaahhh" to me for several weeks. She's also been saying "baahh baaah" for bye bye (while waving) and "daadaaa" for dada. All these first words are an extension of her regular babbling, but today she said her first non-babbling word.

She crawled over to me, tapped me on the legs, and said, "maamaaa, uhhP. uhhP." (up) Then later she crawled over to Bryan and said the same thing. Her first word! Makes sense for a girl who likes so much to be held:)

In other news, Sylvia got her seventh tooth yesterday. It's her top right incisor. That girl is getting a toothy grin!

### **A little help from our friends (2008-12-09 19:38)**

Dec. 9: We had a big, beautiful snowfall today. Most of the day we spent being cozy indoors. That was helped by our wonderful neighbor Jenni who snowplowed our driveway for us while we watched from the windows. THANKS, Jenni!

Mid-afternoon, I took the kids out for a foray into the snow. Sylvia got to ride in a baby sled in our back yard and up and down the driveway. Meanwhile, Andrew shoveled for me. We had fun!

### **Quickest tree shopping ever (2008-12-14 09:04)**

Dec. 14: Yesterday morning, Bryan, Andrew, Sylvia, and I went to Jung's Garden Store to pick out our Christmas tree. We thought about cutting one down, but the idea of keeping things simple seemed more appealing. The four of us walked into the lot, Andrew ran over to the first tree in the aisle, and said, "I love THIS tree! I want to get THIS tree!" It was a fir, which is what I was looking for, and it was a good size. We asked if he wanted to look at other trees, but he insisted that all his love was devoted to this particular specimen. So we said, "Easy enough!" And we walked out with our tree. Bryan was happy to see that his son has shopping tendencies that mirror his own.

In other news, when I brought Sylvia in to say goodnight to Andrew last night, he kissed her and smiled, saying, "Mommy, she smells like laughter!" Heart melting.

We've got the tree up, the house smells like Christmas, and Sarah and Wes came over yesterday to play, make cookies and toffee, and share sweet Charlie with us:) It feels like Christmas.

## Handmade toys in peril (2008-12-14 09:33)



Dec. 14: I've been really unhappy to read that a new law, the Consumer Products Safety Improvement Act (which is going into effect in February) is going to have a terrible effect on the handmade children's toys. The law is a well-intended one, designed to prevent toxins in toys like the ones that have been coming from China. However, the law is going to require anyone who creates children's toys and clothes to have their products third-party tested and labeled. Since undergoing this testing is anticipated to cost four thousand dollars per toy, the natural toy industry - the artists, stay-at-home-moms, and small shops that makes some of the toys I most adore - are going to go out of business - UNLESS the law is ammended to fix this oversight. Here are some good resources to learn more and some links to quick actions to take:

Cool Mom Picks - Save Handmade  
Handmade Toy Alliance

These sites have links to more information, petitions to sign, a Facebook group to join, votes to cast on Change.org, sample letters to send to your representatives, etc.

## Ahh peace (2008-12-15 21:35)

Dec. 15: It may seem like small news, but after a day filled with more crying (Sylvia) and meltdowns (Andrew) than I care to experience in a week much less a 12-hour period, the house is in a state of peace. All three of my loves are asleep. Kitties are snuggled close to me. Candles are flickering, the Christmas tree is glowing, the house is <relatively> clean. I'm sleepy, but I almost don't want to go to sleep because I don't want to miss appreciating this stillness. sigh.

## Around the world in 4 minutes, 29 seconds (2008-12-17 13:16)

Dec. 17: My friend Jen just sent me a link to the following video. Her friend Matt traveled and danced all over the world. And by that I mean ALL OVER the world. Andrew loved hearing the names of all the places (and he kept saying,



"We haven't been there yet. We haven't been there yet. We haven't been there yet.")

This is one video that should make you smile.

For an enhanced viewing experience, the clip is available in high definition on YouTube.

[EMBED]

### **Naptime boogie (2008-12-18 09:49)**

Dec. 18: It's Thursday morning, which means that Andrew is at his preschool. After putting Sylvia down for her nap and quietly shutting the door, I found myself jamming down the hallway, "Get down today! Get down today!" I feel such elation upon anticipating an hour with a sleeping Sylvie and a preschooling Andrew. Made me dance while I made the bed:)

Just thought I'd share my joy:)

Last night we hosted our annual neighborhood party. We had around 15 people attend, and I had such a fun time! Everyone brings a plate of cookies, and then we swap them all around so everyone takes home a variety. We see lots of our neighbors in the summer, but in the winter, conversations become much shorter. It feels good to have a house full of happy friends.

Tonight, Dad, Michael, Lisa, and maybe Becky are coming over to celebrate my dad's birthday. I'm going to make Mom's enchilada casserole. I should be putting it together right now. But I wanted to play on the computer first:)

I haven't taken many pictures of the kids in the last couple weeks, but I got the camera out yesterday, so hopefully I'll have some new ones to share soon.

This morning, Sylvia was having fun with the Christmas tree.

I decided to let her play with one of my Grandma's cross-stitch ornaments. She developed a little very cute game for herself. While sitting in a chair, first she'd pull the ornament off the tree. Then she'd reach over and drop it on the ground. Then (while I hung on to her ankles), she would dive off the chair and reach down to retrieve the ornament. She'd pull herself back on the chair, lean over, and set the ornament back in the tree. After looking at it for a moment, she'd grab the ornament back, and the game would continue.

It was so neat to watch her think through all the steps. What a cutie!

Sylvia has had a temperature and a runny nose for the last couple days. So far, the rest of us haven't come down with it. We're hoping that sickness stays isolated to the current recipient and that no new viruses come our way!

Happy last week before Christmas!

### **Sylvia at 10 months (2008-12-21 18:23)**

Dec. 21: It's hard for me to believe that Sylvie is a full 10-months old. She's become such a fully-developed little person. Here are a few thoughts about my girl at this point in time.

- Sylvia is gearing up to walk. She just started walking behind a walker. Yesterday she needed me to slow it with my foot so she didn't fall on her face. Today, she's already gotten the hang of it, and she drops to her knees when the walker starts to get ahead of her. Amazing! She can't turn it yet, but she can walk all the way down the hall.
- Sylvia loves food and eats just about anything we put in front of her. I actually can't think of anything that she doesn't like to eat. She's figured out what the word "cracker" means, and she'll eat lots of those! In addition to fruit, dried fruit, crackers, and cereal, she likes hamburger, spicy things like enchiladas, tomato-y things like lasagna, mushrooms, pizza...etc!
- Daytime sleep is somewhat better than it has been in the past. She's napping for an hour to an hour-and-a-half twice a day. Once at 9am, and once at 1pm. I'm down to nursing her just before her two naps, before bed, and then two to three times at night.
- Nighttime sleep hasn't been great. She had been waking up once or twice, but these days it's more like three times. She's also recently been doing a lot of back-arching and screaming at night. The last several nights have been particularly frustrating. Bryan and I take turns trying to soothe her, but she often starts crying again a few moments after the soother gets back in bed. Last night after trying to get her back to sleep for what seemed like an hour and a half, we let her cry for a half hour or so until she fell asleep on her own. THANK HEAVENS that Andrew is a sound sleeper.
- A couple days ago, Sylvia learned how to put a toy *back in* a container. She was so proud of herself:)
- She's not clapping yet, and she really hasn't done any baby signs. Also, I haven't heard "uuuhp" in a couple weeks.
- She loves eating snow.
- She loves her daddy and lights up when he comes in the room.
- Television doesn't hold any interest for her. And toys are only interesting if they're being manipulated by someone else. Or sometimes she'll play with toys if she's had a lot of sleep.
- She loves dolls.

That's a quick snapshot of life with Sylvie these days. We're looking forward to celebrating her first Christmas this week!

[EMBED]

### **Snow, snow snow! (2008-12-21 18:33)**

Dec. 21: We've had a lot of snow here the last several days. Our sweet neighbors again dug us out on Friday. Bryan's office closed due to the storm, so we had a long weekend home together.

Joe was supposed to fly home tonight, but unfortunately, the weather out East has been terrible. His flight was canceled, and he won't be able to get home until Tuesday. Instead of flying from Portland to Madison, he'll be flying Boston to Milwaukee. We're sad that he'll be away from home for a couple extra days. We were all looking forward to seeing our dear Uncle Joe.

Today, Andrew learned how to read -2 degrees on our thermometer. And it's windy too! Check out a video of

Andrew, Alivia, and Sylvia for some fun in the snow.

[EMBED]

### Three weeks of photos (2008-12-21 19:35)



Dec. 21: I've gotten behind on taking and uploading photos. I blame Christmas. And reading Eragon. And Sylvia not sleeping so well.

However, I believe that the situation has been rectified. There are now many photos in the gallery for perusal. Lots of playing in the snow pics. Lots of Sylvia-being-cute pics. Even a couple friendly dog pics. Enjoy!

**Animals at the office (2008-12-22 00:00)**



Dec. 22: Last week, Andrew packed up some of his animals in his lunchbox and requested that Bryan take them with him to work. To our delight, we got a report mid-day on how Andrew's animals were enjoying work at OpGen. It seems that all got straight to business. See photos here!

**Christmas preparations (2008-12-22 00:00)**



Dec. 22: We've been doing a lot of fun things to get ready for Christmas. Our refrigerator is covered with containers of cookies and candies. The tree is filling our living room with pretty lights. Last week we had our neighbors over for our annual cookie exchange. A couple weeks ago, we went to Olbrich Gardens with my dad to see the holiday trains. On Sunday, my dad took me and Andrew to A Christmas Carol. It was Andrew's first play (or movie for that matter), and he did wonderfully. He wore his tie and looked adorable. What a fun afternoon we all had! Photos of some of our holiday preparations are in the gallery!

2008 Christmas letter (2008-12-23 00:00)



Althea, Bryan, Andrew, and Sylvia Dotzour  
(3 years) (9 months)  
2008



Dec. 23: Thanks so much to everyone who gave me feedback on this year's photo for my holiday cards. I was pretty happy with split-screen result. Life is just too chaotic to depict it as serene:)

What follows is my 2008 Christmas card letter. Merry Christmas to all!

Christmas 2008

I hope this note finds you well both in health and in heart. Having two little kids fills our days to the brim!

Andrew, our darling, thoughtful, inquisitive three-year-old has jumped right in to our Christmas traditions. He can't wait to open his advent calendar each morning, and he loves to help me bake Christmas cookies - especially when he gets to lick the bowl. Andrew has been going to preschool two mornings each week, and he frolics about with anticipation. He's such a neat kid! Animals continue to be his favorite topic, and he's developing an encyclopedic knowledge of the world's creatures.



Sylvia is 10-months-old this December. Our baby girl's first Christmas! She has lit up our lives like a Roman candle, and my heart is held captive by her impish, toothy grin. Sylvia abounds in energy and determination. She is already starting to walk by pushing around chairs, and she loves to climb. Just the other day, she said her first non-babbling word..."uuhhp!" It's a lot of work to keep up with her beloved older brother, but she's up for the challenge. Andrew recently suggested that we rename Sylvie "Sugar" because she's "tho thweet!"

Bryan and I mostly chase and tend to the children, but when he's not doing that, Bryan is a software engineer at the biotech company OpGen. He's taken quite an interest in chess and enjoys quiet evenings playing on chess.com online. If you're ever looking for a chess partner, I'm sure he'd be game!

I am approaching the one-year anniversary of being a full-time mom. It's been great! I enjoy spending so much time with my kiddos, and while there certainly are challenging times, I've been really happy. It makes a big difference to have friends who are also at home! I feel very lucky.

Our families are doing well. This January, Bryan's parents are celebrating their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary! Bryan's dad gives speeches all around Texas (and increasingly elsewhere), so they're well-seasoned travelers. Ben and Melanie have recently moved to a new place in Dallas, and we have really enjoyed getting to see them several times this summer and fall. My family is moving forward and doing fun things...despite the lack of our sweet Mommy to guide and comfort us all. Michael got a new job at Lands End, and he and Lisa have wedding plans for October of '09. Maretta and Kyle got married last May, and they have a sweet little nest together in St. Paul. Joe is a junior at Bowdoin, and in January he'll be traveling to Sri Lanka for the semester. Oh, how I wish I could join him! Dad has been busy, busy, busy with his political work, and we see him pretty regularly: Andrew loves having lunch with his grandpa. I report on our family's activities in my blog: [dotzourfamily.com](http://dotzourfamily.com). It's an easy way to keep in touch! Amidst this frantically-paced time of year, I hope you find time to settle into a soft chair with a warm drink and perhaps a cozy cat to take a moment to reflect, appreciate, and dream. Best wishes for 2009. Althea

Christmas morning! (2008-12-25 09:55)



Dec. 25: We had a lovely Christmas morning here in the Dotzour house. Sylvia is currently dressed up in an adorable dress, and she's crawling around the room with her new doll from Granny and Grandad. Last night, my family came over for a feast, some singing, a bit of present opening, and a lengthy game of Christmas poker. Between going to bed past midnight, getting up three times with Sylvia, and having Andrew come in at 6:30 (as per normal), I'm less than bubbling over with energy right now. But it's a good, mellow kind of feeling. Andrew had no idea that he was getting more presents this morning. However, he quickly became a speed-demon present-opener. Sylvia doesn't get the ripping paper thing yet. However, she loves to maw down on bows:) The big present of the day is a kitchen for the kids. I LOVE it. They love it. We're going to have some fun! Photos from our morning are in the gallery.

## A whirlwind of visits (2008-12-27 21:19)



Dec. 27: We've had such a great time these last couple days seeing friends! Bryan and I are currently crashed on the sofa after Fondue Part Deux.

On the 26th, Anne & Owen and Heather stopped over for a visit. We all had a fun time catching up and indulging in the wonderful hot chocolate from Aunt Kate. Maretta and I went shopping in the afternoon for a work-blazer. We had lots of success at Macy's. It was one of the first times in recent memory that I was shopping without any children. It was a delightful afternoon!

In the evening, Joe and Becky came over and fixed enchiladas for us for dinner. They helped us put the kids to bed, and then Bryan and I spent the evening camped in front of a movie (me) and the laptop playing chess (Bryan). This morning, our clan trooped through the thick, thick fog to Grandma McElmurry's house where we visited with Grandma, Nancy, Brian, Tom, and Katie for a couple hours. When we came home, we were delighted to find that our friends Josh and Annie were driving through Madison on their way home from Christmas (on their way back to Philly). So they stopped over and we got to visit with them for a while. We last saw them three years ago. How time flies! After their visit, we drove across town to attend Lisa's birthday ice cream get-together. Sylvia and Andrew shared a cup of vanilla ice cream, and I think Sylvia ate more than Andrew did!

Not missing a beat, we drove to my dad's house where we picked up the left-overs from our Christmas Day fondue feast and took them back to our house. Heather and Michael, Maretta and Kyle, and my dad all came over, and we stuffed ourselves once again. Cheese, meat, and chocolate fondue. That's a lot of food...

It's been a great couple of days. Tomorrow may be more relaxed, and that will be fine with me too:)

I'm so glad that we've had the opportunity to see so many friends!

## Christmas photos (2008-12-27 21:58)



Dec. 27: After doing my quick Christmas morning post, I've been away from my laptop for a couple days. I've just sat down and sorted the photos from Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and the 26th. Christmas Eve we spent here at my house. My siblings, their sig-oths, and Dad came over, and we had rib roast, Yorkshire pudding, and a heap load of side dishes. It was a lovely evening. Everyone helped, either with childcare or cooking or cleaning. Then we had a nice Christmas morning here with our little family. Around noon on the 25th, we headed over to my Dad's house for the day. My dad's brother Scott, and his wife, Marcia came up from Chicago to join us, and we all made a huge fondue meal. It was a lot of fun. The Zilics were in Chicago for the day, so we missed them, but it was a fun Christmas.

Pictures are in the gallery from Christmas Eve (and a couple days before), Christmas Day, and December 26th. Enjoy!

## Eighth tooth (2008-12-28 12:44)

Dec. 28: Almost every morning, when Andrew wakes up, he stumbles blearily into the room where Sylvia and I are playing, curls up on my lap, and mumbles, "How many teeth does she have today?" When I tell him I haven't checked, he brightens up, bends down to Sylvia, and asks me to feel to see if she still has seven or if she now has eight. "Still seven teeth," I tell him.

But today, I checked that top left gum, and I felt a sharp edge coming through. "Eight!" I told my boy. "Today, Sylvia has eight teeth!"







# 5. 2009

## 5.1 January

### Imagination gone wild (2009-01-02 09:56)

Jan. 2: Andrew and I got some fun playtime in this morning while Sylvia was napping. His imagination is so vivid. Down the road, I thought I might enjoy remembering how a play-session with Andrew went, so here it is, captured for posterity.

(note: Andrew was naked as a jailbird the entire time we were playing. I was dressed in layers...and was cold!)

After a long game of Sequence for Kids, we snuggled under a blanket. In a heart-warming moment, Andrew wrapped himself around me and joyfully declared that he was so happy that I could stay home with him and Sylvia.

He decided the blanket was a den and we were both foxes. While in our den, he asked me what we were going to eat. I'd name an animal, then he would catch the prey with his hand, take a bite, and give the rest to me to eat. In this manner, we ate nearly every animal I know of...all the animals at the zoo, all the farm animals I could think of, all the backyard birds, forest dwellers, fish, whales, and polar creatures that would come to mind. Full, we'd crawl under the covers of our den and fall asleep until "our bellies were as flat as a pancake!" Then we'd eat more.

Next, Andrew decided we should crawl out to seek our prey. We crawled across the room to the animal dominoes and ate all the animals on the cards. Then we crawled (note: crawling on hardwood floor=not comfortable) to the kitchen where we pulled out our fishing poles (we'd had them on our backs) and fished for turtles to eat. Satiated, we decided to go for a swim.

We swam and swam...all the way to the ocean. The first time we went to Oregon. The second time we went to Minnesota and saw Marettta-fox and Kyle-fox. We brought them back home with us to our den. Andrew was so excited that they are going to stay with us "for a whole week!" I asked if we should dig them their own den, but her wanted them to stay with us. Then we crawled back to the ocean a third time (the Pacific this time) and swam to John and Grace and Tim's house. We brought the Manubay-Ernst-fox family back home to our den. Andrew said that there were one, two, three, four, five, six, seven foxes in our den now. Andrew-fox was so excited to play with John-fox. They played catch the rabbit ("who's going to be the rabbit?" Andrew asked) and hide-and-go-peek-fox. Andrew stayed hidden a long time until John-fox found him. Andrew informed me that John-fox was imaginary...just so I didn't get confused.

After a while, we decided to go exploring, so we crawled down the hall to my bedroom, where Andrew-fox found his den under the covers of my bed. I was a jaguar and he was a badger, but I couldn't get him with my sharp claws because he would crawl down deep in his burrow. Then a muffled voice came from the bottom of my bed, "How about if you be a nice jaguar. Are you a nice jaguar, Mommy?" I said I was, so he crawled tentatively out. Then he declared that he was a jaguar to and he snuggled up in my arms. We spent the next 10 minutes crawling in and out of the covers as mommy and baby jaguar as the seasons rapidly changed and we played with the flowers or the snow or the leaves or took shelter from a snowstorm.

So there you have it...a half-hour play session with my very imaginative boy!

### **Reading obsession (2009-01-02 10:03)**

Jan. 2: I'm re-reading *Eldest* by Christopher Paolini. It's the second book in a fantasy series. The third book came out recently, and I have a copy from the library. Due January 5. Around Christmas, I stopped reading, but in the last couple days, I've gotten caught up in the story again. When I am reading a story I like, it's like an addiction. I can't stop. So today, I've decided not to read until the kids go to bed so I can try to be a good parent:) I've got about 200 more pages to go in *Eldest*, and *Brisinger* (the next book) is probably around 700 pages. Think I'll be able to do it? Anyone want to watch my kids:)

### **Happy New Year! (2009-01-05 09:09)**

Jan. 5: Today feels like the first day of life-returning-to-normal now that the holidays are done. Sylvia is napping. Her naps have been going much better (usually). She's been sleeping for an hour and 15 minutes two times a day. Andrew is watching *Life in Cold Blood* - a David Attenborough documentary series on reptiles. He just curled up next to me sighing, "Cameleons. I like everything about cameleons."

I got the tree taken down, all the holiday decor put away, and all the winter/snowman/polar bear items up. I'm sad to see our tree go. It made a wonderful addition to our living room. I also felt sad to take down the outdoor Christmas lights, so I got some white "January" lights to put up in their place. Stay tuned, neighbors, for pink and white lights in February:) In order to combat winter's dark dark darkness, I think some extra lights and lots of candles help.

<Aside: do you know that aameleon gives birth to live young in the trees? They're covered in a very sticky membrane so they stick to twigs until they uncurl and can grab on to a branch. So amazing!>

lo

Sylvia started regularly screeching again. It's kind of intense. On Friday, I spent the whole day trying to show her how unacceptable I felt like it is to utter her ear-piercing, mind-numbing screech. She's a determined girl. I think she won. In general, she's been in a better mood in general because of her improved napping schedule.

Andrew is now fighting me over the computer.

Goodbye

### **Snowy naptime thoughts (2009-01-09 09:15)**

Jan. 9: The snow is coming down fast and thick this morning. Already, I'm sure it has filled in the tracks that Andrew and I made while we walked to school. Sylvia has a few minutes left of napping, and I'm enjoying the quiet. Because when both the kids are active, it is SO not quiet. Sylvia is screeching all the time. Andrew asks, "why" about almost anything. He also likes to sing songs and seems to live with one foot in his narrated imaginary world where we are all active animals of some sort.

He went back to preschool yesterday morning, and he was so happy to return. I was so happy to have him return! Eli spent the afternoon at our house, and those boys snuggled and played games and in general were two peas in a pod. Andrew was so worn out from the activity, though, that he fell asleep at 6:30!

I spent my Andrew-at-preschool, Sylvia-napping free time yesterday by making a three page to-do list. It was a big brain dump, and it felt so good to free it all from my mind. Then I spent all evening whittling away at some of the smaller projects. I love getting things done. I don't think I can overstate that. It's like gold stars and bells ringing when I get to check off an item on my list. I am, indeed, a complete geek.

In about a half hour, I'm taking Spooky to the vet. He hasn't been out of the house in six years, so it's going to be a big event for him. Spook has been losing weight for the last six months or so. Bowser (his brother) still weighs in at a hefty 14 lbs, but Spook has dropped to 10 or 11 lbs. So, with some trepidation in my heart, I'm taking him in to get checked out.

Wish us luck!

### **Thinking back and looking forward (2009-01-09 09:31)**

Jan. 9: One of the items on my lengthy to-do list is to reflect back on 2008 and to do some goal-setting for 2009. I'm going to use Simple Mom's questions as a starting place, and I thought I'd share!

20 questions for a new year  
2008 reflections

### **Clean House - part I (2009-01-10 08:54)**

Jan. 10: I've been thinking about writing some posts about my struggles and strategies with keeping my home clean and uncluttered. Then I think, "Who wants to read about how dirty my floors are?" But since house cleaning is a big

component of my job as a stay-at-home mom, and since everyone I know has to find ways to keep their home the nest they want it to be, I've decided that maybe people would be interested. So here's the start of a multi-post topic: Clean House!

Background:

Bryan and I were both working out of the home until December of '07. During our time at home, I think we did a good job of prioritizing time-with-Andrew over most other things. So that meant that our kitchen was usually dirty, our meals were unplanned and thrown together, our floors were cleaned only occasionally, and in general, we played with Andrew until he was in bed at which time we both collapsed - most real cleaning and laundry and yard work etc. occurred on the weekends. In some ways, I'm glad that I can comfortably live in a messy home. It meant that I wasn't too stressed out when the bathroom was requesting a cleaning and I told it to wait until Saturday.

After Sylvia was born and I changed jobs to working in the home, I found myself transitioning to feeling like I needed things at a higher state of cleanliness all the time...not just once in a while. But with a new baby and a two-year-old, I didn't know when in the heck I was supposed to find the opportunity to mop the floor or clean the toilet.

Then last June, my friend Julie wrote a post about some of her random quirks. One of her "quirks" was that she never leaves the house without making her bed. Another was that no crumbs are ever left on the counter. I mulled these over in my mind for days. I'd be walking down the street thinking, "No crumbs left on the counter ever?" I sometimes wash off the counter. It is occasionally clean. Before making something new, I usually clean off the part of the counter that I'm going to use. But a totally clean counter every day? wow.

And then bed making. I'd think to myself, "I know how to make my bed." I make my bed when guests come over. Sometimes. I'd put away our decorative pillows years ago because they never made it on the bed. I had put bed-making on my "not going to worry about that" list. I wonder what it would be like if I made my bed every day. huh.

So that was Part I: feeling like things could be cleaner...starting to want them to be cleaner...but really not knowing how to do it...

## **Our girl is 11 months old! (2009-01-11 14:19)**

Jan. 11: It's hard for me to believe that Sylvia will be one-year-old in a month! This morning during breakfast (popovers...mmmmm), we noticed that it is the 11th. Andrew is really fascinated with looking at calendars and talking about the month and date. We noted that now when people ask us how old she is, we'll say, "11 months!" He's so in love with his sister:)

Sylvia is on the go these days. Her daytime naps have gotten really consistent. Usually about an hour and 15 minutes at 9am and 1pm, but sometimes she's napping for longer. The late afternoon/early evening times have become dramatically more enjoyable. She's screeching again, and it's rather terrible, but it's not constant. Plus, she can communicate in other ways now, so she reserves screeching for when she's not getting her way.

Sylvia has lots of new tricks:

- She's imitating. In the last couple weeks, she's started doing things like blowing when I blow. It's so fun to play! She'll shake her head when I shake my head, and she'll do other silly moments and gestures when she's in the mood.

- Sylvia is pushing her little stroller/walker all over the house. She looks so happy and eager and rambunctious when she's on the go!
- She wakes up from her naps pointing at the lambs who live on the top of her shelves. "Mmmmaaa!" she says, "Mmmmmmmaaaa!" I thought originally that "mmmmaaa" meant me, but it turns out it means, "I want." She often wants me. But she also wants Dad, big brother's toys, the remote control, the sink, Dad's beer, a candle, or Poodle Nose (her lovey). She reaches her arm out (often palm up) and announces "Mmmmaa!" Better act fast, or a screech might be close behind! She's also able to direct the adult who is carrying her by pointing where she wants to go and giving negative feedback when you go the wrong way. It's amazing to watch her become more and more able to interact with the world.
- Sylvia loves water. Tubby time is one of her favorite parts of the day. And I've discovered an activity that will occupy her for a long time. I prop her up on one knee and let her play in the sink. Leave a little water running out of the tap, give her something to splash in the water, and she is set. The only problem is that if I want to stop (even after say 30 minutes), she is NOT OK with that. Much screeching ensues. Also, everytime we pass the sink without playing in it, she feels thwarted and verbally punishes her carrier.
- My 11-month Sylvia is a social butterfly. On our hardest days, all that it takes is a new face to make her light up, calm down, and watch with wonder. I think our biggest challenges occur when she gets bored with me. This kid may need some group activities!
- Sylvia still loves going outdoors even though she's bundled head-to-toe. She crawls around in the snow, face-plants in the snow, laughs while I pull her on her sled. Last night I took Andrew and Sylvia each on their sleds for a ride down the street. It was after 5pm, and the sky was dark. The kids were interacting with each other and enjoying watching the glistening white snow as we trekked down to "the Court" and back.
- Nights are going alright. Not fabulous. She wakes up at 10ish, 1ish and 5ish to nurse. I'm glad that the 4am nurse is out. Sometimes the 5am nurse is late enough that I just go the gym afterwards. One night last week, she skipped the 1am nurse. It was wonderful:)

So that's a little snippet of Sylvia's world these days. Happy birthday, sweet impish girl!

### **Spooky's lab results (2009-01-13 19:04)**

Jan. 13: I just received an email with the following info from Spooky's vet:

"Spooky's CBC, chemistry, and total T4 were normal so he is not diabetic or hyperthyroid. His urinalysis showed many red blood cells and transitional cells, some with multiple nuclei, in the sediment. This may be due to a severe inflammatory process or tumor in his urinary bladder or his kidneys."

My brain is processing. Both this news and the following estimate: \$160- \$700 in ultrasounds, x-rays, and radiologist consults. At the low end of that estimate, they can do an ultrasound of Spooky's bladder to look for a tumor. I guess that will probably be the next step.

## Joe is prepping for Sri Lanka (2009-01-14 13:15)



Jan 14: My brother Joe returned from his trip to Death Valley last Saturday. He'd gone out to California to join Terry in a little desert exploration, and I think they had a fun time. So far this week, I've been delighted to have the opportunity to spend three whole days in my young brother's company. It fills up my Joe-box nicely.

Joe is a junior at Bowdoin College, and on January 25, he's leaving for Sri Lanka for a semester abroad. I am so excited for him. I don't think that statement adequately expresses my excitement. SO EXCITED.

Joe got his vaccinations this morning, and in the next week or so we're going to shop for the final items he wants to take on his trip. Andrew has been really curious about what kinds of animals Uncle Joe will see while in Sri Lanka. We've been looking things up online. I love the Internet!

While looking up info on Sri Lanka, I found a blog written by a student who went on the ISLE program last semester. She wrote a blog called Culture Change, and so far it has given me a tantalizing sneak-peak into the experiences Joe may have over the next several months.

Joe is planning to blog about his experiences abroad. You can find him here: [Platos Footnotes](#).

His first post on his travels is copied below. I really love travel...especially international travel...especially international travel that involves an immersion into the culture. Oh, Joe...I hope your experiences challenge and inspire you in wonderful ways.

### Sri Lanka-Part 1:Planning and Preparation

10 Jan



I hope that a few more eyes flit over these and many words to come in the next few months. I will be going abroad to Sri Lanka for the next four months, from Jan 25th until May 18th and intend to use this blog as my primary way of keeping my friends and family informed. Most likely this space will be part summary of daily life and experiences, part sharing of pictures, and part reflection. My time on the internet will be limited to internet cafes, so I hope to update this blog about once a week and keep all of you that I care about abreast of my world since I won't be able to individually. In fact, if you are reading this right now and want to communicate thoughts to me at all, the comments section is probably the best way to do it since, for internet use, this blog will be my primary concern. And I love comments, :-).

Things on \*the\* list to prepare for Sri Lanka include:

- 1) Read "When Memories Die" (which I've completed)
- 2) Learn the Sinhala alphabet
- 3) Read 5th century text on ancient Sri Lankan history
- 4) Peruse some travel guides
- 5) Shop and pack

Given that today is Jan. 10th (well, here it has recently become the 11th, but \*somewhere\* it's the 10th), I have two weeks and a day to prepare for Sri Lanka. I think I'm up to the challenge.

On top of all that, I hope to apply to several internships in D.C. in hopes that I might get one (please, just one, that's all I want) in the next few weeks.

Reactions to "When Memories Die":

The book that I've read so far was a narrative that followed three generations of the same family, starting from about the 1920s until somewhere vaguely in the 1990s. It was a really great book and a perfect introduction to Sri Lanka (I think). If you don't know anything about Sri Lankan history (as I didn't), they were colonized by the British until 1948 and then have had a considerable amount of inner turmoil, culminating in a full civil war by the 1980s (that still goes on today). From what I can tell, much of the civil war is around a racial problem between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.

At some point (it was hard to tell when), Sinhala replaced English as the language of government and instruction, in the face of the Tamil and their language. The last 50 years seem to be mostly growing animosity about which ethnic group came to Sri Lanka first and who was favored by the colonists, etc.

It's all really pretty depressing. It seems mostly to be blind racism that grew and showed itself through a difference of languages and geography. I'll be learning Sinhala while in Sri Lanka, but I already resent that fact to some extent. It will be really interesting to find out more about the political situation from my host family, since news reports have the Tamils (which have been fighting for a country of their own in the North and East parts of the island) losing

the battle.

That's all for now, but I'll try to update later a bit on the geography and where I'll be staying and what I know about it thus far.

**Sylvia has something new to show you (2009-01-14 22:00)**

Jan. 14: Here is my 11 month old demonstrating her new-found skill (thanks Uncle Bubba for teaching her!) [EMBED]  
In case you can't see the video, she's clapping. She started on on Monday!

**Super Boy (2009-01-15 09:05)**



Jan. 15: Aunt Maretta got Andrew a cape for Christmas, and my boy has sure been having fun flying in his super cape. He likes me to take pictures of him jumping, and I made a whole album (at his request) of Superboy jumping. Andrew didn't get to go to preschool this morning because the temperatures were so low. Our thermometer said it was -11 degrees! Even though Andrew loves, loves, loves preschool, and even though he was supposed to be celebrating his birthday at preschool today (since his birthday is during the summer), he's been pretty nonplussed about it all. Instead, he happily helped me wash the windows and dust. What a good kid:-) We've been having a blast the last three days hanging out with Uncle Joe. Andrew sure adores his Uncle, and we're soaking in our time with him.

**Kitten nephews! (2009-01-15 19:59)**



Jan 15: After six months of marriage, Marettta and Kyle have gone and gotten themselves...Kittens! Lucius and Pullo (named for Lucius Vorenus and Titus Pullo, the main characters from the HBO series Rome) are so adorable! They are brothers. Lucius is gray and white and Pullo is white with black spots. I've posted the photos that Kyle sent...Marettta and Kyle, I need more photos. Kitten sweetness! Makes me think back on Bowser and Spooky when they were tiny!

Pet cancer...again? (2009-01-16 13:55)



Jan. 16: After we lost our sweet pooch, April to bone cancer in 2006, I thought we'd had our dose of pets with cancer. However, when I took Spooky back in to the vet today to have an ultrasound of his bladder, our vet found a mass. Dr. Heide noted that she's not a certified ultrasound tech, but there's definitely something in his bladder. And that's consistent with the transitional cells found in his urinalysis.

So once again, I find myself reading articles that reference the staging of tumors, surgery and chemo options along with median survival times. And once again, none of it is good.

Spooky's diagnosis isn't definitive yet. Dr. Heide took a new urine sample and is sending it to a pathologist for a diagnosis. We should hear back in a week.

So there's still hope that he's just lost some weight, has an unusual thing in his bladder, and is totally healthy. But that's not looking terribly likely.

Here's a link to a study that my vet gave me.

Right now, Spook has no symptoms other than being a little on the skinny side (he's 11.5 lbs down from about 14 lbs). So I think I'll just live in that place of happy kitty denial until forced to behave otherwise.

January photos (2009-01-16 14:09)



Jan. 16: It's been a snowy January, and we've had some fun adventures in the snow. If you check out the gallery, you'll see some of the following:

- Sylvia climbing up on a chair
- Andrew's pickle and cheese sandwich "It's good to try new things, Mommy. How do you know you won't like it if you don't try it!"
- Photos of my (now replaced) over-loved Mark Bittmann cookbook
- Chocolate faces
- Sled runs
- Bryan with his kids
- Snow angels
- Snowball-eating-Sylvie
- Sylvia in the sink - boy can that girl play with water for a long time!
- Snuggles with Uncle Joe



**Siesta time imagination (2009-01-20 13:38)**



Jan. 20: I've recently re-introduced a quiet time (dubbed siesta time) into our afternoon. Andrew stopped napping at least six months ago, but there are times when he could clearly use a rest. A book I recently read (*Sleepless in America: Practical Strategies to Help Your Family Get the Sleep it Deserves* by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka) talks about the importance of an afternoon quiet time for kids (and adults!). So for the last week Andrew has had 45 minutes to an hour in the early afternoon when he needs to play by himself. So far he hasn't slept, but I get some down(ish) time and he is practicing playing independently...a skill he doesn't like to exercise often.

Today we made a list titled "Andrew's Playtime" It included play-doh, markers, books, puzzles, animals, and sleep. he was really happy to help me make the list. And I'm happy to take a moment to decompress on the computer before the afternoon cranks up again.

In the last couple minutes, Andrew has brought me two playdoh creations. The first worm-shaped item was announced to me (in a whisper) to be "a velvet monitor...no bigger than my finger." The second worm-shaped item was "an echidna bone." He asked if I could watch it while he went away to see if it "comes alive."

What a kid!

**Spooky health update - no definite diagnosis (2009-01-20 18:34)**



Jan. 20: I just got good-ish news from Spooky's vet. Last week, after doing an ultrasound that showed a mass in his bladder, his vet sent a urine sample to a pathologist to look for cancer cells. I just got the following email:

"Well, the result was non-diagnostic. The pathologist did not see neoplastic cells but could not rule it out."

They recommended sedating Spook to use a catheter to get another sample so they could re-test.

I've got to think about it. So far he has no symptoms other than some weight loss. But there's that pesky mass that the vet saw on the ultrasound. We've already spent close to \$400 on diagnostic tests so far. And if he does have cancer, there's really almost nothing more to do. If he starts to experience pain, or if he has trouble with the litter box, we'd probably put him down. But if it's not cancer...it would be nice to know...

I've been giving him extra treats and more doses of love, and I'm trying hard not to think things like, "Gooood, sweet, [doomed] kitty." "I love you, you cuddly [doomed] cat." "I'm going to take a few photos of you, you pretty [doomed] Spooky-cat."

But hey, maybe he's not doomed. I sure would like to have both of my sweet cats when they are 18 years old. They're only eight right now. I've started to get more used to the idea of him being sick, but maybe...maybe...he's not sick?!

So now I decide if it's worth another \$230 to try again for a diagnosis...

## Favorite tunes (2009-01-22 08:58)



Jan. 22: Before Christmas, I thought it would be fun to write up a list of my favorite music to share as gift ideas. Well, I'm a couple months late, but better late than never! Since I got my iPod last fall, I have gone completely crazy about kids music. I've been sampling a wide variety, and I have some favorites to share:

Althea's Favorite Kids Music (I really enjoy listening to all these):

Renee & Jeremy It's a big world

I love this one! It makes me cry...I listened to it constantly for about four months after Sylvia was born. A friend's baby was born to this CD. I'd describe it as lullabies in magical harmonies. My favorite songs are "Night Mantra" and "Welcome to This World."

The Nields All Together Singing in the Kitchen

Folksy songs with a lot of spirit. Great lyrics. Wonderful voices. I love listening to this one. This is a nice CD to play in the morning to get us all in good spirits.

Justin Roberts Meltdown

The sound here is more of a traditional "kids" CD. The lyrics are hilarious. I love singing them. This is our go-to CD for our crazy-dance-around-the-livingroom-for-a-half-hour time. My favorite tracks are "My brother did it" and "Our imaginary rhino"

Elizabeth Mitchell

Be still my heart. I simply love Elizabeth Mitchell's music. We've had several of her CDs, and I love them all. I could put them on and let them play all day long. I think my favorite CD is You Are My Sunshine, but it could be You Are My Little Bird. She's described as acoustic folk.

## Frances England Family Tree

She reminds me of Elizabeth Mitchell. Her song "Family Tree" is about adding a new child to the family - a new branch to the family tree. There's something very authentic about this music. I love it.

## Dan Zanes Family Dance

Dan Zanes is another regular choice for our crazy-dance-time. He has at least seven out, and I've only checked out a couple of them. "Jump Up" and "All Around the Kitchen" are probably my favorite tracks. Fun stuff!

## Peter, Paul, and Mary Peter, Paul, and Mommy

I grew up listening to this one. It's probably Andrew's favorite CD. He loves singing "Puff the Magic Dragon" and "The Marvelous Toy" and "It's Raining." I sometimes listen to it when I'm alone in the car too.

I hope this introduces you to some new artists! And now my question for you...what are/were your favorite songs to play with your kids? I'd love to hear about to more new music!

**Cold weather laughs (2009-01-22 09:20)**



Jan. 22: As I was driving last weekend, I happened across Garrison Keillor's Prairie Home Companion radio show. We'd just had a week with temperatures (here in Madison) hanging in the -10 degree region. He was speaking to a Kentucky audience, and his News from Lake Woebeagon made me laugh out loud. Since everyone could use a good laugh, I'd encourage you to listen to this segment about living in the frozen north. For those who live here, it's nice to laugh at ourselves, for those of you in warmer climes, you can laugh at us!

**Joe's off! (2009-01-25 09:11)**

✘ Jan. 25: In a few hours, my little brother, Joe, is going to get on a plane to start his semester-long adventure in Sri Lanka. I think he's a little nervous:)

The ISLE program just put together a webpage with info on the seven students in the program. It looks like they'll be updating this webpage with info on the student's travel experiences (and photos too!). I've also continued to enjoy reading a blog written by a student in the fall '08 program. Here's the link to her posts from the start of the program. But I'm most interested in hearing about Joe's experiences. He's done a couple pre-departure posts on his blog. The latest one also included a video of him packing. Makes me smile.

Bon Voyage, Joe!

### **My grandma is 90! (2009-01-25 09:22)**

Jan. 25: Yesterday, my mom's mom - Mum - turned 90 years old. Bryan, the kids, and I drove down to Janesville to share a little cake with her. My mom's brother, Peter, his wife Marci, their son, Scott, his girlfriend Nikki, and her son, Darren were all there. We had cake and ice cream, and joined Mum and her friend Fred for her birthday lunch. Here's a video of Mum getting her birthday cake.  
Happy 90th! What a milestone!

[EMBED]

### **Date night (2009-01-25 13:41)**



Jan. 25: We're having a little family siesta time right now. Sylvia is sleeping, Andrew is playing quietly, Bryan is reading a chess book with Spooky on him, and I'm on the laptop with Bowser on me. A good Sunday afternoon moment of calm.

Last night, Michael and Lisa came over to watch the kids while Bryan and I went out to dinner at Samba Brazillian Grill for Bryan's OpGen holiday party. I'm a little embarrassed to say that this is only the second time that Bryan and I have gone out to dinner (sans kids) since Sylvia was born. The other lovely evening was in August when we left the kids with Grace and Tim for Kacy's wedding rehearsal dinner.

It felt so good to be out with Bryan without Sylvia. What a treat! Michael and Lisa did a great job. Michael is pretty fearless about tending to a crying baby, and while it sounds like her bedtime involved around an hour of sadness, he prevailed in getting her to sleep. They've offered to help us out with babysitting more regularly. I love the idea, but I know that my young ones (mostly the youngest one) are kinda a challenge. I'll have to figure out how to take advantage of their offer without taking advantage of their generosity!

I've gotta say, I love the idea of getting out for evenings with my husband more often:)





Jan. 26: Andrew sure is a cute kid! Tom came over this morning, and he and Andrew had a wonderful time playing and writing letters together. Andrew has been tracing letters for the last month or so, and Tom was teaching him to free-hand letters. They were having a blast. It gave me a chance to clean the bathroom, wash windows, dust, vacuum, mop, and do meal planning for the week. Thanks Tom!

I've been keeping a list of cute Andrewisms, and here they are:

- Andrew: "Mom, can you make me a pickle and cheese sandwich?" Me: "Uh, I guess so." Andrew: "Are you going to have one too?" Me: "No." Andrew: "You know, it's good to try new things, Mom."
- This has been an ongoing joke of Andrew's for the last couple months. While we're eating a meal, he burps. Then he says, "Excuse me!" One of us will say, "You're excused." He cracks a huge smile and laughs, "I'm not going anywhere!" It never gets old.
- On Sunday morning, Andrew woke up before Sylvia and (amazingly) entertained himself for a while. After hearing him up for a while, I finally roused myself from the bed to go and check on him. He was lying on his

back on the bathroom floor looking up at me. Andrew: "Mommy, I am all alone, and I need someone to care for me!"

- We rented a Sesame Street Healthy Muppets video...kind of a work-out video for kids. Andrew has loved watching it. After jumping up and down along with the show, he came over to me and put my hand on his chest. Andrew: "Mom, feel my heart! It's pumping with joy!"
- After reflecting, Andrew said to Bryan, "I love all the adults in the world." He has some pretty wonderful adults in his life!

In other news, I had a large snafu with my camera last night. I downloaded 200-some photos after which the computer crashed. When it rebooted, the images were gone and I'd deleted them off the camera. I'd be more annoyed if they weren't all photos of the cats, Sylvia making crazy faces, and Andrew jumping off the chair. I'm mostly worried that since this happened once it could happen again. The thought keeps me up at night.

### **Sylvia's tricks (2009-01-28 10:40)**

Jan. 28: Sylvia is doing so many new things these days. She's walking with assistance, she's clapping and signing "more" and just started blowing kisses. We got some of these party tricks on the following video.

[EMBED]

### **Cranky? (2009-01-30 08:28)**

Jan. 30: On Tuesday night I went to a great presentation at Andrew's preschool on helping children understand and process their emotions. The speaker was great. She made me laugh a lot. Apparently effective parents do what is called "emotion coaching." The first step is emotional awareness - that is your own emotional awareness. Therefore, I have been endeavoring to get more in touch with my own emotions. And right now, I'm cranky.

I was out last night with friends until after 11pm. When I came home, Sylvia had been up and unhappy for a bit. Bryan wasn't in the greatest mood because of having a miserable baby, so I calmed her and we both silently went to bed. Then after doing (just) one night feeding, Sylvia woke up when my go-to-the-gym alarm rang at 5:55am. She often wakes up at 5 or 6 but goes back to sleep until 6:30 or 7am. Not today! So I didn't go to the gym and instead got up with her. And she was mostly in a good mood, but I was so tired. And then when Andrew got up he was cough, cough, coughing up a storm. He was scheduled to celebrate his half-birthday at preschool today (this is the second re-schedule because the first two times it was scheduled school got canceled). So I spent all morning trying to decide if I should send this very coughy kid to school. And my metrics weren't the most altruistic.

Pros of sending him to school: I made muffins for his birthday snack (again!), he's excited about his birthday, I need some time alone today, he loves school and will be really sad if he doesn't go, he keeps telling me how he'll cough into his elbow so he doesn't make other kids sick, he was coughy yesterday but didn't seem to feel bad or have diminished energy

Cons of sending him to school: Might make other kids sick, might drive teachers crazy, might be better for him to stay indoors, keeping him home would probably be the more cautious, responsible thing to do

So I took him in, talked to his teachers, and ran home (literally) to put Sylvia down for her nap. I'm hoping that an hour of quiet will restore my equilibrium!

Update: Moments after hitting post, the phone rang. One of Andrew's preschool teachers was on the phone to tell me that Andrew seemed really low on energy. She asked him if he wanted to go home, and he said, "yes." So I asked my neighbor Sandi to come over and listen for Sylvia while I ran down the street to pick him up. Thank heavens that I didn't have to wake the baby!

Right now Andrew is watching Robin Hood. And eating pretzels. And I still get to have some down time. So it's all good:)

### Photos of Joe in Kandy (2009-01-30 13:57)



Jan. 30: I just got a fun note from the directors of Joe's Sri Lankan study abroad program. Sounds like all is well. They have updated the program's website with photos of the student's travel, arrival, Sinhala lessons, and meeting of host family. We should get three more such updates over the course of the next four months. You can see all the pictures on the ISLE website.

Also, if anyone wants to write to Joe, send him packages, or anonymous love letters, his snail mail address is below.

Joseph Babler  
c/o ISLE Center  
75 Dangolla Road  
Kandy, Sri Lanka

**Above freezing!** (2009-01-31 13:10)



Jan. 31: The kids and I are having a great day today. Bryan is doing a chess tournament at the technical college. Andrew's still got a bad cough, so since he's sick, I let him watch Lion King. He's watched Robin Hood dozens of times, and he watches segments of animal documentaries nearly daily, but he's only seen other feature-films rarely. Having watched Lion King a couple times in the past couple years, he was nervous about the scary parts. We talked about them a lot, and he's very intrigued with this new movie.

Sylvia took a good hour-and-a-half nap this morning, and then we bundled up and went to the Overture Center for a Kids in the Rotunda performance. Afterwards we met up with Terry for lunch at the Plaza. It felt so nice to walk around outside when it was not bitterly cold. I think the thermometer said 36 degrees. That's about twenty degrees over what it's been recently, and we enjoyed it!

Sounds like Bryan's home now, so I'll run. Have a great weekend!

## 5.2 February

**Photos!** (2009-02-01 21:13)



Feb. 1: For those of you looking for a way to pass a few minutes on a wintery Monday morning, I've uploaded three albums of photos into my gallery. Here's the last couple weeks, here's an Obruch outing with Jessica and her kids, and here's this past weekend. Enjoy!

**Time out with chocolate** (2009-02-03 12:54)

Feb. 3: Moments ago, I could be found sitting on the kitchen floor next to an open cabinet door. This gave me easy access to the bag of chocolate chips I have stashed there. Usually I grab a handful here and there, but I kinda needed a good luxurious time with my chocolate bits. So there I was, sitting on my dirty kitchen floor in my workout sweats,



ignoring the unhappiness coming from the other room, and reaching into my secret stash for just one more taste. In the words of PioneerWoman.com, "Just keepin' it real."

**Andrew's crazy about letters! (2009-02-03 13:16)**



Feb. 3: Andrew has been loving letters. This morning, for example, he woke up at 6am when I was heading out to the gym. I tried to convince him to go back to bed, but he didn't want to go. When I asked him what he would do to amuse himself, he said, "Write letters" and sleepily stumbled into the sunroom to his chalkboard. Tom has been coming over most mornings the last couple weeks, and he and Andrew have been writing up a storm.





Andrew has been writing capital letters. He's writing lower-case letters. He's making letters out of play-doh and blocks and string. He's trying to read words every-which-way. When the mood strikes with this kid, I need to be ready to go!

It's been great having Tom over, because he's a great teacher and follower, and he and Andrew have been having a lot of time to write together. Sylvia doesn't always make it super-easy to write with the little guy. She wants to eat chalk!

In other news, both kids have been pretty sick this past week. Andrew's mostly better, but Sylvia is a miserable wreck. Poor darling clearly feels awful.

**The girl knows her mind (2009-02-03 19:00)**



Feb. 3: I was grocery shopping at Woodman's yesterday. Sylvia identified something she wanted and was trying determinedly to catapult herself out of the grocery cart. A kind, elderly woman standing nearby commented, "My goodness, it seems like she really knows what she wants. You wouldn't think she'd be old enough to know what she wanted!" Then the nice woman walked away, leaving me speechless. I think my jaw may have dropped. Because, quite truthfully, Sylvia has known what she wanted since the moment she came into this world. And really, woe be it to she who tries to convince her otherwise!

As I was putting Sylvie to bed tonight, I was reminded of two areas that she continues to feel adamantly about. The girl has an abiding opposition to books. She also really can't stand it when I try to soothe her with lullabies.

Since she was old enough to focus her eyes, she has arched her back and turned away when I hold a book in front of her. She has no interest. Zero. I've tried reading her the same two pages of the same book for several weeks, and she stopped crying, but she is much happier when I don't try it. Occasionally, she'll glance at the page, but she then tries to shut the book. It's, well, interesting. The big exception is Pat the Bunny. She really enjoys that book and does all the activities. It's so cute to see her smell the flowers, play peek-a-boo with Paul, and put her finger through

Mummy's ring! So we'll keep trying.

As for lullabies, even when we were in the hospital after her birth, she would wiggle uncomfortably when I would sing to her. We sang to Andrew all the time. I grew hoarse singing him to sleep. For Sylvie, however, the best way to calm her when she was tiny was to hold her tight against my body and leap exuberantly up and down while kinda shouting "SHHHHHHH SSSHHHHHHHHH!!!" Then we learned about the effectiveness of the oven exhaust fan. And I found myself buying her a \$50 machine whose sole purpose is to make white noise.

I've since read several of Mary Sheedy Kurcinka's books, and I'm finding that Sylvia's temperament can be (currently) characterized as "energetic" "persistent" and at least for sound "sensitive." She notes right in her book that kids with these personality traits can have a hard time sleeping because they are easily stimulated (even by things like lullabies) and often find things like white noise machines helpful.

This reminds me that I loved *The Happiest Baby on the Block* and recommend it to new parents. And Mary Sheedy Kurcinka's book *Raising Your Spirited Child* is a wonderful read for parents of children with all personality types. Her book *Sleepless in America* recently encouraged me to try putting Andrew to bed earlier. He's now getting about an extra hour of sleep a day, and that's been a good thing all around.

I'm interested to find where Sylvie's determination will take her in life. She's quite the girl!

#### **Off to Texas! (2009-02-04 10:00)**



Feb. 4: When I drove to the gym at 6am, the thermometer said 0 degrees. That's just one of the many reasons that

I am super-excited about our upcoming trip to Texas! The kids and I are flying down to stay with Bryan's parents tomorrow. Bryan will join us on Sylvia's birthday (Wednesday the 11th). Then we all get back home the following weekend.

Andrew has been frolicking about for the last several days with happy anticipation about seeing Granny, Grandad, Melanie, and Ben. It'll be so fun to see them and to hang out in a new location for a while! Bye bye (for a while) cold winter!

### **We're here! (2009-02-06 10:13)**

Feb. 6: The kids and I had a good day of plane travel yesterday, culminating with a joyful greeting of Granny in the College Station airport. Andrew and Sylvie did a great job on our flights, and the flights couldn't have been smoother. In fact, our flight from Madison to Dallas got in a half hour early. I was happy to have one less half hour to keep the little miss amused:)

Andrew has been vibrating with enthusiasm since a couple days before our trip, and since we've been here, he's been in a state of general rapture.

The day is sunny, the weather is warm, and me thinks we are going to have a lovely day!

### **Child care respite (2009-02-09 07:20)**

Feb. 9: Yesterday (Sunday) was Sylvia's due date. She was a few days late, but I so clearly remember how I felt this time last year...wanting to get that little baby born!

Since Bryan's parents were both home yesterday, they suggested that I take off for a few hours in the afternoon. I didn't take much convincing! So I went out and did a little shopping... I found a pair of cute heels for \$11, and I got a pedicure and am now sporting purple toe nails! Sylvia is very intrigued by them and keeps checking them out:)

I came home for a quick clothes change and a hello to the kids, and then Mark and I went out to hear a Beethoven symphony. LuAnn got the kids supper and put them both to bed, and Mark and I went out to dinner together. So thanks to my incredibly awesome parents, I got about eight hours off from any parenting duties! Amazing!

In other news, Sylvia learned how to nod yesterday. Now when we ask her a question, she often nods "yes" in response. Previously, she only could shake her head "no," but "no" meant either "yes" or "no"!

### **Joe's posts from Sri Lanka (2009-02-09 20:06)**

Feb. 9: A couple days ago, Joe made several posts to his website about his experiences as he begins his semester in Sri Lanka. I'd been jonesing for an update and his descriptions helped me feel like I've gotten a glimpse of his life with his host family. I've copied his posts below, or you can read them on his website: <http://platosfootnotes.net/>

New Posts

07 Feb

Hey hey. There are three new posts below. It seems it will be pretty hard for me to get to the internet/make phone calls/send individual emails/etc. So if you want to communicate with me, comments on \*this\* post would be best (until there are new posts, and then those accordingly). I replied to some comments a few posts below, and will do so accordingly on here. It feels a little weird to be herding people to contact me like this, but I like you all and can't manage to do so any other way.

Thanks! And I'm off to the north of the country for a week (but not that far north)!

Permalink

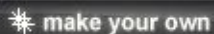
3 Comments

Comment on this post

### **Sylvie's first year (2009-02-11 14:43)**

Feb. 11: Here's a slideshow of some of my favorite pictures of my dear little girl as she moved through her first year here on earth.

[EMBED]

 make your own

 view all images

### **Back, safe, home again (2009-02-16 08:20)**

Feb. 16: I'm writing to you from my sofa in wintery Wisconsin. We flew back home from our wonderful stay in Texas. I've missed my kitties and my friends, but I think I could have stayed with Bryan's parents for another couple weeks! Our flight home went super-smoothly. Andrew drew in his connect-the-dots, trace-the-letters activity book for hours, and Sylvia charmed the pants off our fellow travelers while we were at the airport, and she did alright on the flights. She doesn't like toys a lot, so amusing her on my lap in an airplane is a little dicey, but she slept most of the flight from Dallas to Madison.

I've just downloaded 400-some photos onto my computer, so processing and uploading those should keep me busy today!

Bryan is home from work today because he has president's day off (who knew!). So we're pretending that it is Sunday, and we're having a good morning petting the kitties, and getting re-settled in our sweet home.

### **For a little laugh (2009-02-16 08:34)**

Feb. 16: I just happened to pick up a newspaper a few weeks ago, and I ran across this comic. It really cracked me up, so I thought I'd share!





Sylvia's birthday cake (2009-02-16 22:16)



Feb. 16: It's 11pm, and I should be in bed. I told Bryan that I would get off the computer around 10:30. But he's asleep, so he'll never know!!!!

I've been editing and uploading photos from our Texas trip. It's all part of my plan to pretend that I'm still there.

You've now got around 100 photos in my Texas trip album to peruse. There's a sub-album of pictures from Sylvia's first birthday party and another sub-album of pictures of the creation of this wonderful panda cake.

I think this cake is just the cutest thing. LuAnn made it for Melanie for her first birthday. She's held on to the cake pan for the last 27 years, and it made a come-back for Sylvia's first birthday on Saturday. I asked LuAnn to make it, because while I love to have hand-made things for my family, I really prefer someone else to make them:) That's a secret, so don't spread it around.

I'm so glad to have a mother-in-law who makes such wonderful things for my kids. Sylvia has two new pairs of overalls that are just adorable.


Oh, be sure to check out the last two pictures in the panda cake album. When Andrew saw the cake in the morning, he pulled himself up on the counter and got his tongue as close to it as he could without touching it. What a card!

### **Etsy find (2009-02-20 10:27)**

Feb. 20: I have lots of things I want to post about. The fun things we did in Texas, the cute things Sylvia is doing (pointing, nodding, standing unaided for a few seconds, repeating sounds). But instead I read blogs and responded to emails. Sylvia took a nearly-two hour nap. Andrew's at preschool. I'm feeling better. So it's a good day.

Partly because this pretty bag made me feel so happy:

### **The skinny from Sri Lanka (2009-02-21 15:19)**

 Feb. 21: There's a recent wave of news from Joe while on his study abroad program in Sri Lanka. He called me early last week, and we had a great 15 minute chat. Sounds like he's doing really well. It was fun to hear his voice and to hear him relate some stories. He got to hear Sylvia screech at him from across the world. She wanted to hold the phone.

Joe has several blog posts that I have copies below. See the originals here. He's planning to reply to comments, so if you'd like to leave him a little howdy-do note, you can do so here.

Joe just completed the first session of the program, and the ISLE program website has been updated with lots of nice pictures of the students and descriptions of their activities. There's also another page of pictures for those who just can't get enough.

Also, for those of you who aren't up on your world events (I'm raising my hand here, I only get my news on my 8 minute drive to Curves in the morning), there's been some intense changes to Sri Lanka's civil war. The Tamil Tigers have been fighting the Sri Lankan government since the 1970s. Fighting has escalated since 2005, and in the last week, the Sri Lankan government announced that they captured some important territories in the Tamil Tiger area. The fighting...and there's lots of it...has been limited to the northern edge of the island - about 150 miles from where Joe is staying in Kandy. The BBC has some good info on this conflict if you'd like to learn more.

New Posts, 02/21/2009

21 Feb

There are four new posts below. I came to the internet cafe a few days ago, but my blog was down then so I couldn't update. Also, session I has officially ended and session II starts tomorrow. If you want to get the official low down on what happened, go here:

<http://www.bowdoin.edu/isle/2009-spring-program/s09-session1.shtml>

Furthermore, I'm loving the comments and am so glad people are reading/enjoying. Comment here (rather than the posts below) and I will endeavor to actually reply to them, next week.

## **Fun memories from Texas (2009-02-21 21:36)**

✕ Feb. 21: Andrew turned to me today, and said, "I miss Texas." "You do?" I said, "What do you miss most?" Wistfully, Andrew replied, "The Bounce."

He's referring to a place we went twice where kids can play on inflatable bouncing houses, big slides, obstacle courses, etc. He loved it. Photos are here.

Here in Wisconsin, we've had five or so inches of snow falling today. Makes me think back fondly on car washing, barefoot tree climbing, and crawling-with-no-snowsuit.

Andrew had a good time playing with Grandad's toy animals. In fact, some amazing things happened with them. Apparently, at Grandad's house, when you leave the animals outdoors overnight, they get big and play while you sleep. Andrew discovered this when he came out the next morning and found that the animals had magically moved around. Andrew was in complete awe of this situation. His eyes get all big and his whispers about how the animals get big overnight at Grandad's. They sometimes climb up into the trees or put their heads in the dirt!

The kids had a great time playing with the miniature kitchen cabinet that LuAnn's dad made for her when she was little. Sylvia loved pulling out the little dishes so they would make great crashing noises as they fell on the floor.

Andrew really enjoyed playing songs on Granny's beautiful piano. One game that he particularly enjoyed was to take decorative vegetables out of a display basket and "play their song." So there was radish songs, carrot songs, and here's a picture of Andrew playing a "cabbage song."

Andrew's little heart has been oozing love these past weeks and months. Not to diminish the sincerity of his expressions of love to to any individual, but he gushes on a near-hourly basis statements like, "I love you more than you can even imagine." or "I love you up to Jupiter." or "I love you so much I can't even tell you." One of my favorites though, was when he told Granny, "I love you as far as from where macaroni comes from." That's far, my little guy. That's very, very far.

## **Sylvia's first birthday (2009-02-21 22:04)**

✕ Feb. 21: It's hard for me to believe that my little girl is one year old. I had a lot of fun going through her photos and putting together slide show of her first year. Time just flies (At least when it's not the middle of the night and the baby is crying. Then it certainly doesn't fly.).

It's amazing to watch Sylvia learn things each day. She can point to her toes now. And my purple-painted toes. And Daddy's toes. The girl is infatuated with toes! And she can do the sign for hat (patting her head). And the sign for "milk" and for "all done" and sort-of for "more" and for "flower" and for "eat." And she makes it very clear that she wants to be picked up. Her whole body requests it.

In the last couple weeks, she's mastered the fine art of pointing. She points at everything. All the time. And she can direct me all around the house (she likes that game!). She often points with two fingers as that seems to convey the energy of her request a bit more fully.

While we were in Texas, Sylvia learned how to nod. Whenever she heard a question, she would nod, and it was so funny to watch. Her head moved like a bobble-head doll. Instead of nodding with her forehead like adults do, she nods with her chin, leading to some rather exaggerated, smile-inducing movements.

She's just started standing unassisted for a few moments here and there. And she can walk around very fast

when she's holding on to fingers. No unassisted steps, yet. I'm glad she waited until she was one. Now I'm ready. She got some cute shoes for her birthday, and once she's walking, they are going to be so sweet on her feet! When we go places like Olbrich where the ground is damp and dirty, I find myself starting to think that walking would be a good idea. I'm just glad she has stayed a crawling baby as long as she has. Crawling is so cute!

Sylvia got a couple drums for her birthday, and boy does she like to beat on them. She really likes to toot on horns and shake shakers and bang on drums. I think we're going to sign her up for a Music Together class next month.

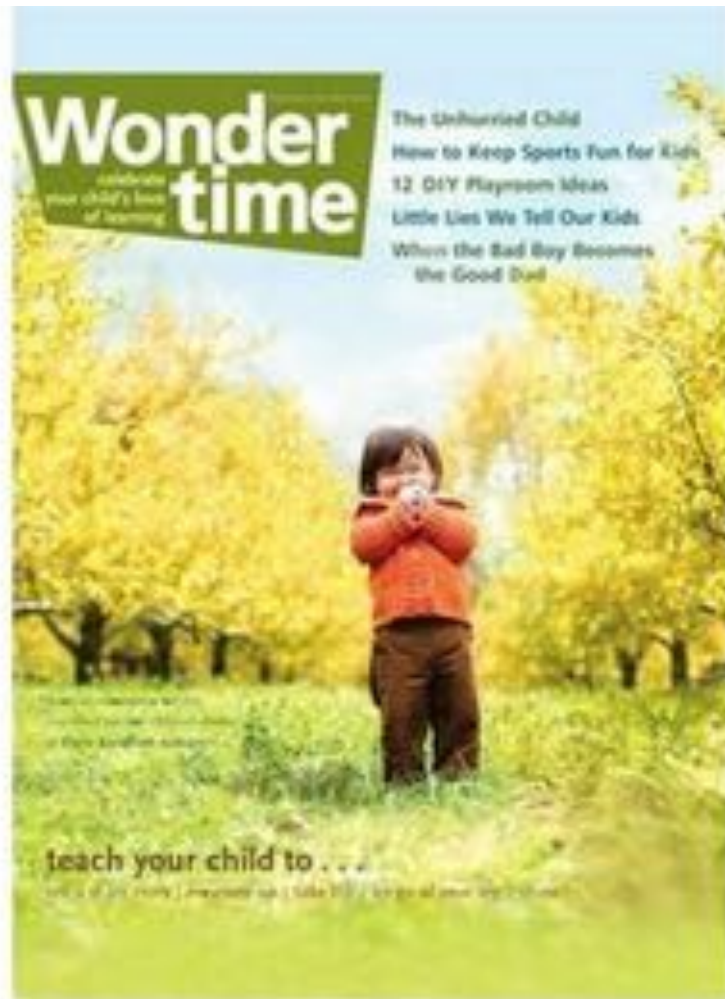
I've posted some sweet photos of my little 12-month-old in her birthday party gallery.

Oh, in other news, Sylvia has taken to enjoying a couple more books. She really likes the Karen Katz lift-the-flap books, especially Nose, Ears, and Toes. Yay!

Yesterday, we discovered that Sylvia can repeat several sounds on command. When asked, she'll say, "Mm-maa mmaaa" "Dada" and "baa baa." And she's also (sometimes) following some simple requests. Like, "Sylvia, can you pick up that toy and give it to Mama?"

These kids, they grow so fast. It's a pleasure and an honor to watch.

**I love to laugh (2009-02-22 18:37)**



Feb. 22: The kids and I have been listening to Mary Poppins a lot recently. I just love that movie. And I also love to laugh.

Today I enjoyed a few quite moments with my favorite magazine: Wondertime. One of their contributing writers, Catherine Newman often has the ability to totally crack me up. And this month's article really tickled my funny bone. I always like to share good writing, so I encourage you to check out the following article on The Birds and the Bees.

By the way, to my great sadness, Wondertime is going under. March is going to be the last issue. I really appreciate blogs, magazines, and other resources that celebrate the magic and challenges of parenting. Hopefully when the economy recovers, Wondertime will make a re-appearance.

**Oscars alone (2009-02-23 13:03)**

Feb. 23: I love watching the Oscars. And usually I have a party or at least a friend over to watch it with me. Back in the 90s, Mom and Maretta and I would watch together. Oh, how I love the dresses. I haven't seen any of the movies,



but for me, it's not about the movies (except to know what to add to my Netflix que). It's about the fashion. (See here for some favorite dresses from the past.)

So last night was a little bit sad because Oscar night totally snuck up on me and I had no plans. Grace informed me of the impending glamor the night before while we were chatting on Facebook. Bryan sat near me and played chess online while I watched, but it's just not the same as having girlfriends to dish with.

So here are some of my thoughts on this year's Oscars...


First off, I think Hugh Jackman did a great job hosting. I loved his opening number! You can catch it here.

Second, I thought that the re-do of the theater was beautiful...it really looked special. I didn't like, though, how they had the band playing while the presenters were talking. It was distracting for both the speakers and the audience.

Third, I am a fan of the new thing they tried this year where past actors offer a personal tribute to the acting nominees. It seemed like a lovely way to honor all the nominees in a way that was really very meaningful to them. And several times it made me cry, which I consider a big plus.

I was hoping to post some of my favorite and least favorite dresses, but I've got a request to play. That's more important! You can see some of the pictures here.

### **Sylvia's 12 month check-up (2009-02-24 15:53)**

 Feb. 24: Sylvia had her 12 month check-up yesterday. She's growing well, this young girl. On the way to the doctor's Andrew and I brainstormed what kinds of things the doctor would do to Sylvia. We also contemplated what would happen if I was part-way through reading Andrew a story when the nurse had questions to ask me. Turns out that this was a good thing to have discussed ahead of time as I think it helped avert a very fussy boy.

As usual (thank goodness) this was a very boring visit. I don't think I've had a question for the doctor since Sylvia was born. That's not to say that I don't obsessively look parenting topics up online, but since the day she was born (wait, since the day of my first prenatal appointment) I've felt a little like a lousy parent because I haven't had any questions to ask. It's not that I feel like I know everything (far from it!!). Other than having her ear infections, there hasn't been anything amiss with my little miss, and her pediatrician had about zero helpful input on her lack-of-napping situation.

So he asks questions and I give blithe answers and we both nod and smile. And I find myself kind of wishing that doctors made house calls so I hadn't had to bundle the kids up and expose them to doctor's-office-germs. However, I am glad that we have modern medicine:)

Anyway, the take-home vitals from our visit were that she now weighs 19 lbs, 11.5 oz, and she is 29.5" tall. That puts her in the 24th and 59th percentiles respectively. She's long and lean, this girl!

## 5.3 March

### March!! (2009-03-02 09:04)

x I wonder if the sap is stirring yet,  
If wintry birds are dreaming of a mate,  
If frozen snowdrops feel as yet the sun  
And crocus fires are kindling one by one:  
Sing robin, sing:  
I still am sore in doubt concerning Spring.

Christina Rossetti

x

### Painting with puddin' (2009-03-02 20:46)

x March 2: It's cold outside! Playing outdoors is less than fun when it's below freezing, so we decided to have a little silly fun today. I got a pudding cup and some brushes, got the kids undressed, and they painted the tub. It was Sylvia's first time "painting." She now thinks that paint is delicious! Cute and silly photos are in the gallery. We ended our painting session with a bath to wash off all the pudding and then another bubble bath with me blowing bubbles at the kids just for fun!

### Winter weekend at Jack's (2009-03-02 21:24)

x March 3: We're back home after a nice, long weekend at Jack's. Our group was diminished this year. Maretta and Kyle were supposed to join us, but Kyle broke his leg a couple weeks ago. Poor guy slipped on the ice and broke his leg. He had surgery last Wednesday. So we missed Merry and Kyle, but we all had a nice time. Pictures are in the gallery.

Terry, Tom, Michael, Lisa, and I drove out on Thursday night. On Friday, we drove to McGregor, Iowa to have lunch and do a little shopping at some sweet shops they have there. Paper Moon is a great store...be sure to stop by it if you're ever in the area.

Bryan drove out on Saturday morning, just in time for breakfast. We headed up to the woods on Jack's land and burned one of the many brush piles that Jack has created while doing land restoration work. Andrew had fun sliding down a hill on his bottom...over and over and over! Later in the day, Andrew and Bryan had a great time playing outdoors. When Andrew came in, his cheeks were so red, it looked like he had applied rouge :)

We enjoyed celebrating Sylvia's first birthday (Feb. 11) yet again with a delicious cake. She likes people singing to her!

Over the course of the weekend, we played several games of Trivial Pursuit. When we played with a more recent set of cards, some of the "youngsters" shone...particularly Bryan and Michael. Thanks to Bryan's great contributions, the Jack/Bryan/Tom team won on Saturday evening.

Overall, it was a great weekend. The kids had a nice time, I had a nice time. I'm already looking forward to going back this summer!

### **Photos from February (2009-03-02 21:32)**

March 4: I just uploaded a couple weeks worth of pictures. For your viewing pleasure, these photos include:

- Andrew, Alivia, and Sylvia in costumes
- Sylvia standing unaided (then falling)
- Sylvie's great new eggplant hat made by Heather
- Andrew and his snowman
- Tom playing with the kids
- A wintry outing to Olbrich

### **Wednesday morning - fever and markers (2009-03-04 08:40)**

March 4: Sylvie came down with a fever. She was cranky yesterday...I thought teething. But last night she was up a lot, and this morning she was warm. So I took her temperature, and it was a bit over 100 degrees. I'm bracing for another stuffy nose cold. We've been disease-free for nearly a month. One glorious month of not wiping noses or rocking sick kids through the night. Now, I'm ready to dive back in. I'm ready. I'm ready.

While Miss Sylvia takes a much-needed nap (good gracious was she in an angry mood), Andrew has been writing in a workbook. He's so excited to trace words and do mazes and read a little.

On one page of the writing workbook, there was a picture of a skunk. Andrew didn't know how to spell skunk, so he went into this room, and he found his animal bingo game. He brought it out to the living room, and pulled out the chips until he found the skunk. Then he carefully copied down the word "skunk" into his workbook with a pink marker. That kid never ceases to amaze.

Last night I did a seasonal decoration change. All the snowmen and polar bears and snowflakes have returned to the basement. In their place, I have my almost-spring decorations...St. Patrick's Day, picture frames, and colorful boxes. I've got really old pictures in some of the frames, and I think I'm going to try to pick some more recent pics to replace

them.

Hark! I hear a cardinal singing his spring song! That's a sound that brings a smile to my face.

Have a great day!

### **Some of my favorite things (2009-03-05 09:07)**

March 5: Here are a few things that make me happy:

- SmartWool socks. All day, every day. Thin ones, thick ones... They keep me warm and they are made of magic. My SmartWool long underwear is my new favorite piece of clothing. I wear it nearly every day. And at last, it's winter and I'm warm!
- Kosher salt. I have mine in a bowl on the counter, and I love being able to reach in and grab a pinch to season food. I like the tactile nature of it; the way it makes cooking feel. When I boil pasta, I grab a spoon and scoop out a generous spoonful to salt the water. Makes my pasta taste oh, so good.
- Homemade vanilla lattes. I don't get to coffee shops much at all anymore (sniff), but most mornings, I make myself a latte with my Areolatte milk frother and some vanilla syrup.
- Netflix. Bryan and I don't have cable, and we watch TV almost only for football (Bryan) and red carpet events (me). However, we do watch a lot of shows with Netflix. We just finished a couple seasons of Lost, and next we're going to watch Battlestar Galactica. I think another Deadwood has been released, and we're really enjoyed some of the Masterpiece Theater BBC shows.
- The NieNie blog. I ran across this blog several months ago. It's written by a woman...a great writer...with four small children. She'd been big in the blogosphere for quite some time, writing about the magic of life and the wonderful in the ordinary. Then she and her husband were in a plane crash that killed the pilot and burned something like 80 % of her body. She's recovered enough to begin posting again, and I find her story so compelling. It makes me appreciate life a little more. Today's post made me cry.
- Talking with friends on the phone. Jessica called as I was writing this post, and my face now has a big smile on it, and I feel good from laughing. I'm so very glad to have friends!

Sylvie took a long, long nap this morning (2 hours, baby!!). That also makes me really happy. She's making stirring noises right now. Here I come, my love!

So now tell me, what are some of your favorite things?

## **A little spring in my kitchen (2009-03-07 15:32)**

✕ March 7: Right around this time of year I get a ache in my heart for green. Perhaps that's one of the reasons that St. Patrick's Day is my favorite (aside from Christmas) holiday. You pour on the green and rainbows and silliness just when I need it most.

It's been above freezing and/or raining for the last couple days, and the thick piles of snow are shrinking. As I walked Andrew to preschool yesterday, the water pouring down the street into the storm drains sounded like a mountain stream burbling, gurgling and splashing. The kids and I pulled our stroller up from the basement yesterday, and we inaugurated the season of going for walks by heading straight to Java Cat for a cake batter gelato.

It's still going to be a few weeks until there's much hope of bulbs emerging from the frozen ground (see pics from Jessica's garden on March 31 last year), and I need flowers now.

So last week the kids and I went to Jung's Garden Center to see out hope. We came back home with a pot of hyacinths, just coming out of the dirt. It's been wonderful to watch them come alive and bloom on my kitchen table. And the smell...oh the sent of spring! It's enough to make me wiggle like my dearly departed dog, April would when she saw someone she loved. Head to toe glee. Bryan got me some perfume for Valentine's Day this year. It's call Shedonism by Origins, and to me, it smells like spring. I've been putting it on before bed every night to give me good dreams.

Since computer smell-o-vision hasn't been developed yet, you'll have to use your imagination, but I hope these photos helps bring thoughts of spring a bit closer to you too. Here's a high resolution version of the above photo for you to use on your desktop or anywhere it might make you happy.

## **Tuesday morning touch-in (2009-03-10 06:21)**

✕ March 10: Daylight Savings Time sure does weird things to my kid's sleep! Sylvia is just peeping now, and it is 8:20am! She normally wakes up before 7am. She got a new molar over the last week, and it was pretty uncomfortable for her. There were several nights when she was up seven or more times between 10:30 and 6am. Urgh. She also had a low fever and some nose runniness for five or six days.

Seems like her tooth and/or her malady have gotten better. She's been a delight to be around the past couple days. She is doing so many baby signs. I'm going to try to take a video of her to share.

Andrew is currently watching videos of baby animals nursing on YouTube while I type. He's tucked between my arms. On Sunday, he and I had a date with "just Andrew and Mommy. No Daddy or Sylvia." He wasn't too interested in such an arrangement (he very much prefers time with Daddy!), but we had a great time. We went to a bike shop and tried out bikes. Then we got him a bigger bike helmet. Finally, we went to Andrew's first movie in a theater. We saw The Tale of Desperaux, and Andrew loved it. He sat on my lap, with his soft cheek pressed against mine. I imagine that he'll go to lots of movies in his life, and I'm glad I could be his date for his very first one.

## **Quote for the day (2009-03-11 13:01)**

Into my will  
Let there pour strength,

Into my feeling  
Let there flow warmth,  
Into my thinking  
Let there shine light,  
That I may nurture this child  
With enlightened purpose,  
Caring with heart's love  
And bringing wisdom  
Into all things.  
Joan Salter, The Incarnating Child

I just ran across this on a new blog that caught my eye. Lovely sentiment.

### Who could ask for anything more? (2009-03-13 17:48)

✕ I got rhythm, I got music, I got my girl  
Who could ask for anything more?  
I've got daisies in green pastures  
I've got my girl  
Who could ask for anything more?

Oh, I've got rhythm  
I've got music  
I've got daisies in green pastures  
I've got starlight  
I've got sweet dreams  
I've got my girl  
Who could ask for anything more?  
Who could ask for anything more?

I wasn't too keen on the prospect of giving Sylvia a bath this evening. She had a pretty good day, but by 7pm, I was pretty wiped, and I felt like pressing a little "off" switch on the back of her neck as opposed to going through our 40 minute pre-bedtime routine.

So I decided to get in the tub with her tonight. You should have seen the look of amazement on her face. "Mom is in the tub!!" She was grinning from ear to ear, and she kept kissing me...mostly by leaning toward me and making her kissing noise, "mmmMMMMak."

Sylvia was laughing and rollicking about, and then I convinced her to float on her back on my lap, and she liked that a lot (yet another sign that she is not, indeed, her brother). We pulled her water whistles into the tub and were taking turns blowing them, and she thought that was great fun. Then she asked me to move a bit so she could get to the back wall and pound on it. She loves to drum on the back wall of the tub. It makes a great sound. As she was doing that, I was thinking about how much she loves to make music...how delighted she gets when she can pound a drum or shake a rattle or toot a whistle. I hope that making music (or just noise) will help this young




firebrand channel some of her amazing energy. It certainly makes her happy.

So as she was pounding away with her open fist on the back wall of the tub, I sang to her, "I've got rhythm, I've got music. I've got my girl who could ask for anything more?"

After a bit, she turned her beautiful face up to me and did her sign for "all done." It feels so good to be connected to this child. I do love her so!

PS. After I had wrapped her up in her towel and was carrying her out of the bathroom, she spotted a bottle of bubbles that I had sitting on the counter. A couple days ago I had given Andrew and Sylvie a bubble bath and blew bubbles at them too. Sylvia saw the bubble container, gestured emphatically at it, and threw her body around to indicate (under no uncertain terms) that I was to reverse course. We walked back to the tub, and she pointed at the tub, grunting and lunging toward it. "No, Sylvia, we're done with the tub," I said. "Remember that you said, 'All done.?' " It took me a few moments to put together that she wanted to do another tub with bubbles, but when I did understand I couldn't help but feel amazed at how much this little 13-month-old knows and understands. She sure is fun!


### **Green Week (2009-03-13 19:38)**

 March 13: Some of the blogs I have been reading have been participating in "green week." The first week in March, people all over the country were taking pictures of green things. I didn't know about it until it was over, but then I ran across a hand-full of my own pictures depicting green. Here they are!





### **March pics (2009-03-13 19:55)**

 March 13: It's Friday night, and Bryan and I are watching Battlestar Gallatica. I'm also spending some quality time with my laptop. Ahhh, a wonderful evening. I've uploaded some new pictures from the last couple weeks into the gallery. See here for set one (March 6-9) and set two (March 10-12). Pictures include:

- Sylvie doing some of her baby signs (all done, bath, toes)
- Andrew having special moments with me and Bryan
- Andrew sporting his new bike helmet
- Andrew and Eli being leaping superheros

- Sylvia screaming bloody murder
- Celia and Sylvia pushing each other around in a cart

### Meal planning (2009-03-15 08:32)



March 15: Every weekend, I spend a little time mapping out our dinners for the week. I try to do this on Saturday. Then on Sunday one or some (in this case, Bryan and Andrew) of us go grocery shopping. It might be more appropriate to say that we brave the Woodman's crowds in search of our food.

I started meal planning about a year ago. Before then, we had a dozen or so meals that we commonly made, and we bought the staples for those meals weekly. So we didn't really need a shopping list, and we didn't really use recipes too often. That was when we were both working and dinner was something that needed to happen at the end of the day when we were both tired and wanted to play with Andrew.

But now things are different. Since I started staying home, I've taken on dinner. It used to be Bryan's terrain, and now it's mine. And I like to make new things. So every week I look through magazines (Martha Stewart's Everyday Foods is my favorite) or cook books and find seven meals...almost always ones I haven't made before...to put on my list for the week. We still have our staples, and I don't tend to plan our lunches (no need when they are all mac & cheese or pb & j or malt-o-meal muffins).


It's a pretty good system. The best part is that on any given day I don't have to think about what I should do for dinner. I just look at my list. I don't like to have to think or be creative when I just need to start a meal. Especially when Sylvia is needy of being held and Andrew wants me to tell a story. That's no time for me to be deciding if we have the ingredients to make some pasta dish. My meal planning keeps me sane and keeps us well-fed. And it means that I get to try out new recipes all the time, and that keeps my creative side happy.

Here are some of my meal-planning resources:

- I got a "plan-it" organizer when I was starting to meal plan. A notebook would work just as well. Really, there's nothing special about this. Well, maybe spending \$18 on my meal-planning notebook made me feel obligated to actually do it. I do like having everything in one notebook where I can look back at what I did in the past. On the rare occasions when I want to make a recipe twice, it's easy to skim back and find favorites. I think after I fill this notebook, I'm going to use Google Calendar to track my meals. That's what Simple Mom does, and it seems like a good technique.
- My Woodman's shopping list. After writing up my week's worth of recipes (and noting what page they are all on), I pull out a shopping list and start writing up what ingredients I need. Here's a copy of my list for others who might find it useful.
- Everyday Foods. I seriously love this magazine. Thanks to Jessica for introducing me. It comes out 10 times each year, and I've made about 80 % of the recipes in each issue. They are all fast. They are all easy. They are all good. And they tell me how much time it will take, which I love. Most of the recipes are available online. They also have an e-newsletter you can subscribe to. Go forth, enjoy!

Do you have any meal-planning tips or recipe-sources to share? I'd love to hear if you do!

### **Tweeting (2009-03-15 08:54)**

 March 15: Did you notice the new little flashy application on the side bar? That's my new Twitter status. There are lots of times that I have the computer on and the kids have done something funny or sweet or horrible or enduring and I want to share it, but I know I won't have time to fire up my website-updating program. So now I can pop off a quick note via Twitter (I just enter the text into the URL bar of Firefox!) and it will show up here on my webpage. If you'd like to comment on any Tweets you see, just pick some post and comment. I'll see it! Let me know what you think!

**All through the night (2009-03-16 08:23)**



March 16: One of my mom's favorite lullaby's was from Hansel and Gretel, "Sleep my child, and peace attend thee; all through the night." I like singing it to my kids. But up until Saturday, March 14, Sylvia hadn't partaken in the song's suggested timeline. This last weekend, she finally slept "all through the night." It was magnificent. She slept from 7:30pm to 7am without waking us once.

A couple nights before, I had slept through the night. Bryan woke up with her once. Also on Thursday night, she slept for a total of 14 (!!!) hours. She went to bed at 7:30, woke up at 3 am to nurse, and then didn't wake again until 9:30. Unbelievable. In general, the switch to daylight savings time has worked really well for our family this year. We kept putting the kids to bed at their normal bedtime (which felt to them like an hour early), and then they slept until their normal wake-up time...or much later.

Along with her crazy-long nighttime sleeping, last week Sylvia switched to a single-nap. It seems like she's back to waking at 7am and napping at 9am and then 2pm. But last week she was waking at 8:30 or 9am and then napping at 11 or 12 for several (or more) hours. Overall, it was an amazing week for sleep. And what a joy my young girl is to be around when she is well-rested. It makes such a difference!

**Fantasia...thank you (2009-03-16 13:37)**




March 16: Sylvia is taking her afternoon nap, and Andrew is humming along to Beethoven's pastoral symphony as we watch Fantasia. I'm finding myself very thankful that Andrew likes watching movies. It gives me a little down-time. I'm also grateful that his movie selections are limited to Fantasia, Fantasia

2000, the David Attenborough wildlife documentaries, Animals are Beautiful People (a kids wildlife show from the '70s), and Robin Hood. Oh, and The Lion King sometimes makes an appearance. They're all shows I enjoy listening to, and it means that Andrew hasn't ever even heard of most of the characters in most modern movies. So he's not jonesing for shoes or cereal or pajamas that sport the logo of some Disney product. I am really not a fan of having my children being walking billboards!

Hmmm...take five on that comment that Sylvia was napping. She's apparently not napping. That girl! I was hoping she'd take a good nap so we'd all be nice and rested and could pull out my bike and hook up the trailer and go for the first bike ride of the spring!

It's a stunningly beautiful day today. The last piles of snow are melting, and the ground is wet, wet, wet!

### **Snip snip (2009-03-17 07:49)**

 March 17: Happy St. Patrick's Day everyone! The weather is promising to be beautiful today. We're meeting friends at the zoo for our first group outdoor activity and picnic of the spring!

Andrew's working on some shamrock crafts to give to his friends, and he's dressed from head to toe in green.

I have my hair in pigtails with the shamrock bands that Heather gave me years ago. This morning, Andrew walked up to me with his crafting scissors in hand and snipped at one of my pigtails. A clump of hair fell to the ground.

Disbelieve was conveyed. A discussion ensued. At least I already have layers in my hair, so hopefully this will just add a little more volume. I hope.

### **Mommy, you can depend on me (2009-03-20 11:33)**

March 20: Yesterday I did a birthday card shopping run. Andrew helped me pick out birthday cards for our late March and early April family birthdays...Michael, Joe, Melanie. As I was in the card section, I scanned the "mom" birthday cards and had a hard spot in my chest as I contemplated that I would be getting my mom a birthday card (her birthday is April 7) if she were here to receive it. As winter fades into spring, I've found myself thinking of Mom a lot. And missing her. Missing that she is missing all this life around us.

I had a song on this morning that pushed all the buttons I needed to have a little cry about missing Mom. It's a song from an album called Generations. The mom/daughter team sang at Maretta's elementary school, and we went to a concert together.

Here's the lyrics from a song called "You Can Depend On Me" that get me going every time:

Just as that old river flows, as the sun comes up and the north wind blows, just as sure as these are guaranteed, Mommy you can depend on me.

(Daughter): Down in your heart you know that I'll be there I'll be with you if you're here or anywhere. And if you're troubled, my song will lift you up so high, 'till happiness is shining in your eyes.

Just as that old river flows, as the sun comes up and the north wind blows, just as sure as these are guaranteed, Mommy you can depend on me.

Together and never apart.  
Forever you can bet your heart

(Mom): Deep down inside honey, you know that I'll be here, I'll be with you if you're here or anywhere. And if you're troubled and feeling like you can't go on, let my love for you give you strength to carry on.

Together and never apart.  
Forever you can bet your heart

Just as long as that old river flows, as the sun comes up and the north wind blows, just as sure as these are guaranteed, honey, you can depend on me. Together and forever in sweet harmony, Mommy you can depend on me.

The part where she sings "if you're troubled, my song will lift you up so high, 'till happiness is shining in your eyes" makes me feel so sad because it reminds me how much I liked making Mom happy. I loved to make her laugh, to do things that made her proud. I liked the way her voice sounded when I surprised her with some little treat. The little exclamation of delight. The happiness that would shine in her eyes. And it makes me so very sad that I can't see those beautiful eyes again. I don't get to hear her say, "Oh, SWEETIE!" when I show her something I made. It makes me weep.

When I'm listening to this song, and that verse makes me feel a moment of desperate sadness, then the mom's verse sings, "Deep down inside, honey, you know that I'll be here, I'll be with you if you're here or anywhere. And if you're troubled and feeling like you can't go on, let my love for you give you the strength to carry on." And I know that my mom's love for me, for Michael, Maretta, and Joe...for Dad and Terry and for Andrew and Sylvia...for our whole family is still alive inside of us. I miss her but I feel her love all around me. And I know that if I wasn't here that my love would be left behind as well. Because when you take away the body and distill our spirits down to their truest essence, you've got pure, fierce, unending love. Andrew and Sylvia are going to be loved by me forever no matter what happens to any of us.

So we can be together forever. Even when we're apart. But I do miss my sweet mommy even so.



### **New bike for my boy (2009-03-23 13:40)**



March 23: This morning, Andrew, Sylvia, and I headed through the rain, across town to check out a bike. I'd been checking craigslist for 16" bikes, and last night I found a good one. I spoke with the seller this morning, and within a couple hours, Andrew was giving the red bike a spin around the seller's garage. Andrew was pretty reserved and didn't want to try it again after the seat was adjusted for him, but he quietly told me that he liked it and wanted it. So currency was exchanged, and the bike is now in the trunk of my van, waiting for young Andrew to experiment with it.

A few weeks back when we were talking about bikes, I told him he'd have to decide if he wanted it as an early birthday present or if he wanted to wait until his birthday. "It would be nice to use it in April, May, and early June," I told him, "but then he would have to be prepared to not get any big presents from us for his birthday."

To my surprise, he's decided he wants to wait until his birthday to "get" the bike. This in turn is making me realize that I wanted him to have it now so he'd have more time to ride it this spring/summer! hmmm That Andrew is quite the fellow. I've never met anyone quite like him.

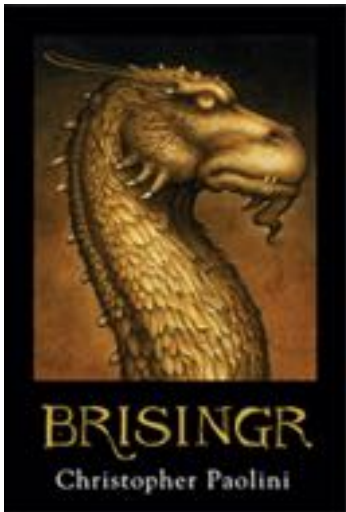
He smiles and laughs so much these days. It's a joy to behold.

### **Walking! (2009-03-23 14:24)**

March 23: This last weekend, Sylvia has really gotten interested in her walking skills. We spent a lot of time in the yard, and she would stand up in the middle of the yard and try to take a couple steps on her own. She'd crash fast, but it's one of the first times that she has tried walking on her own (and not between me and Bryan).

She's taken a total of about three steps on her own, but she's gotten the idea that if she could do it more that it could in fact be a mode of transportation...and she's intrigued! The video below was taken on Saturday morning.

[EMBED]



March 25: The kids and I had our first Music Together class at Happy Bambino this morning. It's the first class (aside from story hour) that I've taken with Andrew since I was on maternity leave with him! I'm excited to have a class to go to every Wednesday morning. Attendance is Sylvia's birthday present from Granny and Grandad...and she LOVED it. She was grinning and bouncing and squealing the whole time. (Andrew was curled in the corner with his bottom lip protruding most of the time...it was a little boisterous for him. But bizarrely, when we left, he lept up and down exclaiming about how fun it was (!!??).)

Tom is playing with Andrew now, and Sylvie is napping, which is giving me a chance to catch up on the happenings of the interwebs. I haven't been on the computer in the evenings for a few days. I started a book and am knitting a baby hat, and both of those activities are addicting. When I am reading a good story, I have a very hard time doing anything else. Like feed my children.

The other day, I thought, "I won't read my book until after the kids are in bed."  
Then I wandered into the room where the book lay innocently on my nightstand.

"I'll just move the book to the bed so it's ready for me tonight," I thought.

There it lay, nestled upon my comforter.

"I'll just lie down on my bed for a moment. Feuf! I'm tired!" I lied.

"Wow, this bed sure is cozy, and Andrew and Sylvie aren't in imminent danger, so maybe I'll just cozy up to this large book that also happens to be on my bed."

"I'll open the book to the spot where I left off last night."

...

...

Bad, bad, bad. Isn't something considered an addiction when it interferes with your normally functioning life. Yes. Reading addiction.

But after that, I've gone cold turkey for the last couple days. Instead I'm working on a sweet little hat. Almost. Done. Must stay up one hour more... Another addiction. I think I have an addictive personality.

Anyway, enough about me. Today is my brother Joe's birthday! 21 years old today. In Sri Lanka. He's done some great posts recently. You can read them (and comment too...that'll make him happy) on his blog: Plato's Footnotes.

Michael's birthday was last week. We went to dinner together and had a nice time and ate yummy cake. I have photos. They'll get edited and uploaded soon.

Soon as I finish my book!!!! HAHAHAHAHAHAAA!!!

<runs to bedroom>

### **Booster seats (2009-03-26 09:03)**

March 26: I've been thinking about moving Andrew to a booster seat. He'd enjoy being able to unbuckle himself, and the five-point harness is a bit of a pain to buckle. Before I headed to the store, though, I looked online, and it sounds like I'm going to need to wait a while to move him to a booster.


"You can safely switch your child to a booster seat if he's at least 4 years old and he weighs 40 pounds or more (Andrew is 35). Whatever you do, don't move your child to a booster seat simply because she's had her fourth birthday. Car seats are the safest option, so keep using yours as long as it fits."

The boosters I'd been looking at say that they are good for a 30 lb child, but I guess we'll be waiting a while to purchase one!

### **Daffodils for your table (2009-03-27 08:01)**

March 27: Our hyacinth bulbs have passed on, and I've since gotten some cut daffodils (and now some cut tulips) to add a little spring to our home. They don't smell as amazing as the hyacinths, but they're so bright and beautiful. Here's a picture of some daffodils in high resolution to brighten your desktop. Also, check out these adorable knitted eggs. I love them!

### **More photos...the last of winter (2009-03-27 20:49)**

 March 28: Sylvie had her first full morning of daycare on Friday. I have started her going to an in-home daycare on Friday mornings. My goals are 1) For her to be OK being away from me 2) For me to have some non-Sylvie time and 3) For her to get to play with a bunch of kids. I was really worried about her maybe feeling scared and abandoned, but Donna said she did well. Relief!


While she was at Donna's, I worked on the last couple weeks of pictures. They're all now uploaded and in the gallery...the last of the winter '09 album and the start of the spring '09 album. Yay Spring!!

Photos in this most recent batch of uploads include:

- Eli and Andrew playing and climbing trees
- My goofy, goofy, silly kids

- Peeks of green in the garden
- Goin' to the zoo with friends
- Michael's birthday
- Knitting projects
- Lamb farm visit

### **Weekend in St. Paul (2009-03-30 12:01)**

 March 30: This past weekend, Terry, Tom, and the four of us drove up to St. Paul to visit with Maretta and Kyle. We haven't seen them since Christmas, and it was so nice to spend some time together again! Kyle broke his leg and had surgery in late February. He's recovering, but he's going to be on crutches for at least several more weeks. We hadn't met Kyle and Maretta's kittens yet. They got Lucius and Pullo in January, and they are just adorable! Pictures of the kittens and our weekend are in the gallery.

During our weekend, we played in the hotel's pool, visited the beautiful Como Gardens, and ate a great dinner at Bucca di beppo. The kids really enjoyed our travels. Tom drove home with us and kept the kids entertained for the entire four hours, allowing me to finish my book!  
Our visit was short, but we all had fun. And now it feels nice to be back home again.

The kids both have runny noses, and Sylvie clearly isn't feeling great, so it's helpful to be back in our own environment. Oh, and last night we learned the fun news that Bryan's friend Kaleb had a baby boy! There's a new little person in Sweden we want to meet:)

## **5.4 April**

### **Email catch-up (2009-04-02 09:13)**

April 2: I think I can fairly, openly, and truthfully say that I am a chaotic and procrastinating correspondent. Before email, it was letters, and now my gmail inbox is...well...it's frightful. Yesterday, when I sat down to begin to dig my way out, I had nearly 100 messages that needed something done. I'm down to 40 now, and that's a good thing. I really liked Simple Mom's email management suggestions. Seems like I fluctuate between being really productive and being completely, utterly unproductive. Like this week I didn't do meal planning, and each night I've been at a loss for what to make for dinner. It's so stressful for me when it is 3pm and I don't know what I'm making. Fortunately, lentils came in handy on Tuesday and we did pancakes and sausages for supper last night. This weekend, I'm making plans for sure! Actually, I was thinking about just using Simple Mom's April meal plan since she looks like she picked out some good meals.

I have about eight blog posts I've been wanting to do, but I just heard Sylvie roll and bump into her crib walls, so me thinks I won't do it now!


### Knitting frenzy (2009-04-03 09:01)

✕ April 3: I'm an on-again, off-again knitter. In 2007, I started a sweater for Andrew. I worked on it very occasionally over the last year-and-a-half, and last night, I finished it. I actually finished it a few weeks ago, but when Andrew tried to pull it on over his head, the neck hole was too small. So I ripped out a shoulder seam, and last night I added buttons. In the last month, I've also knitted three baby hats. And I've got two more projects in the works. I love reading and knitting. And editing photos. I could do any of those three activities for about 10 hours a day. One thing that has made knitting even more fun is a cool website called Ravelry. It's an online knitting community, and it's so neat! Seriously, if you like to knit, you should check it out. You can post pictures of all your projects, but then the great part is that you can look up patterns (many of which are free), and if you're thinking about doing a pattern, you can type it into the database, and you can see the pictures of all the people who have made that pattern. You can see what kinds of yarn people used, what modifications people made...it's so helpful! For really popular patterns, there might be hundreds of pictures of the finished projects. It really helps get an idea of what you can do. There's also a yarn section where you can type in a yarn and see what projects people have made with that yarn. I love it. I've spent hours tagging favorite patterns to try. I've been meaning to post about this for quite some time. If you join ravelry, look me up! I'm adotzour!

Here's a screenshot of Jessica's Ravelry projects page. I do one sweater, she does 16 projects:)



### **Pictures from Sri Lanka (2009-04-05 08:37)**

 April 5: Joe called me last night from Sri Lanka. He sounds good. We talked about summer jobs and his recent activities and the growth of Sylvie and Andrew. In the last few weeks, Joe has done quite a few posts to his blog. A couple of my favorites are about Nutella and about the animal life in his living quarters. He also wrote about his first trip to the Indian Ocean. Ahhh. He's planning to start an internship at an orphanage/compound located near the ocean in mid-April.

Joe recently uploaded hundreds of pictures to his Picasa album. Andrew and I went through them all and picked 75 of our favorites. I posted them here to my website. Enjoy!

### **Sweden! (2009-04-05 12:15)**

April 5: When we clicked "confirm" last night on Expedia, Bryan and I firmed up our plans to travel to Sweden this July! Bryan's best friend from college, Kaleb, is getting married in Sweden, and Bryan is going to be his best man:) The kids are going to stay with their amazing Granny and Grandad while Bryan and I jet off to Europe for a week. Wow. Kaleb's fiancée, Karin, is Swedish, and they have been living in Stockholm. The wedding is to take place in a rural town called Årbotten. Here's what Karin said about it:

My mom was born in the little town Årbotten, which is in the middle of the forest close to the border of Norway. Värmland is the landscape of fairytales and poems, the landscape of many lakes and streams and the place in Sweden in which my families roots reach back hundreds of years. My granddad was a miller, as well as his dad and his granddad, and the water powered mill is still standing just by the the house my mom and her sister grew up in as the fourth generation. The house now a days belongs to my auntie and her husband but we get to enjoy it too! We all help to keep the place in shape and last summer's project was to paint the mill. I have always been dreaming about a wedding in Årbotten, it is a very romantic place!

I can't wait to spend some time in the land of "fairytales and poems"! Bryan and I will be celebrating our 10th wedding anniversary in June, so a big trip in July is just the thing to celebrate.

Here's a map showing the two main locations we'll be playing.



IFRAME: [http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d &source=s \\_d &saddr=stockholm,+sweden &daddr= %C3 %85rbot-ten+sweden &hl=en &geocode= &mra=ls &sll=59.800807,12.600932 &sspn=0.01075,0.041199 &g= %C3 %85rbot-ten+sweden &ie=UTF8 &ll=59.489726,15.358887 &spn=2.677744,7.03125 &z=7 &output=embed](http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d&source=s_d&saddr=stockholm,+sweden&daddr=%C3%85rbot-ten+sweden&hl=en&geocode=&mra=ls&sll=59.800807,12.600932&sspn=0.01075,0.041199&g=%C3%85rbot-ten+sweden&ie=UTF8&ll=59.489726,15.358887&spn=2.677744,7.03125&z=7&output=embed)

[View Larger Map](#)

Kaleb and Karin just had a baby boy last week. We're really looking forward to spending some time with them and meeting their new little guy. I found lots of inspiring photos of Stockholm and Värmland on Flickr. In happy anticipation...

Althea

### **Mornings (2009-04-06 10:00)**

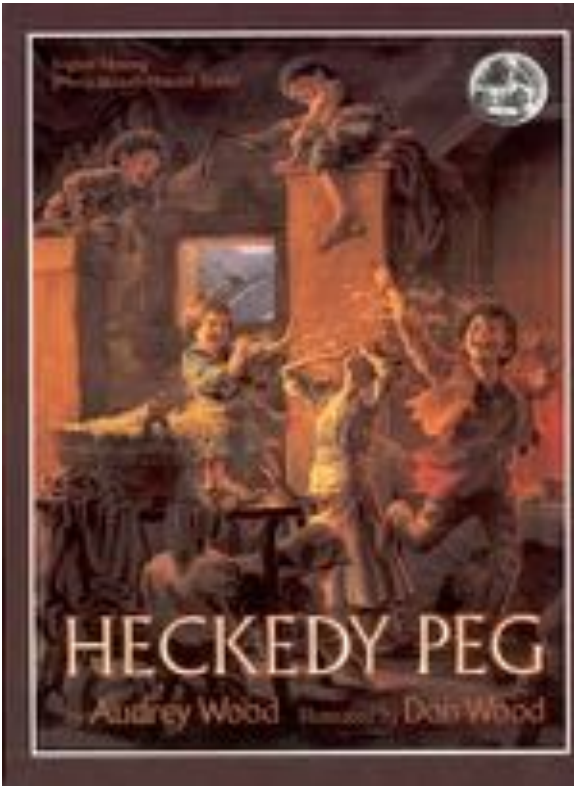
April 6: Dawn is coming earlier these days. Spring is creeping its way up toward Madison.

These mornings when the clock shows 6:30, my mind unwraps from its cocoon of woolly sleep to hear the pitter-pat footsteps of one young Andrew as he makes his way from his room over to our bed. If I'm lying close to the edge of the bed, I'll wake to a kiss on my nose as he lifts up the blankets and climbs into my sleepy nest. I'll doze as he wiggles and pats and snuggles, jiggling more insistently as the minutes tick by.

Before too long, Sylvie rises, and I hear her call, "Mmmmmaaaa MA! Mmmmmaaaa MA!" She isn't calling for me per se. It's more the one phrase she uses to indicate that she wants something. In this case I translate it as, "Hey everyone! I'm awake! Someone come get me so the party can begin!" I'll throw back the covers and go to get her, with Andrew running ahead calling, "HI SYLVIE! Good morning, sweetie girl!!" Then he climbs on the side of her crib and attempts to kiss her. She in turn attempts to dodge his kisses and instead tries to levitate into my arms. She sometimes reminds me of the way that Toad would jump in Mario II; kicking off and fluttering her feet after liftoff.

I bring both kids back to bed. Sylvie climbs over me to peer at her dad, tilting her head to the side to examine him. Andrew lies between us contemplating breakfast (raisin muffin or eggs and toast today?) Sylvie might have a little nurse in the bed, but she's often too excited to explore. Both kids pull back our black-out curtains...full of anticipation about what the day will hold.

### Mom's birthday (2009-04-07 12:32)



April 7: Today is my mom's birthday. She'd be 57. To celebrate her birthday, I had Dad, Terry, Tom, Michael, and Lisa over for dinner last night. We ate Dutch babies (puffy pancakes with apples), sausage, and a rolled spinach omelet. Then for dessert I made a chocolate sheet cake. It used 3 3/4 sticks of butter. It was....delicious. Mom would have approved:)

This afternoon I read Andrew one of Mom's favorite stories, Heckedy Peg by Dawn and Audrey Wood. It was one of those times that as I was reading, I was crying so much I couldn't really get the words out. The story is about a mother who saves her seven children from a witch (Heckedy Peg) who had turned them into food. Here's my favorite part:

The witch pointed to the table.

"Here are your children," she said. "If you can't guess them right the first time, I'll eat them for my supper."

Keeping her feet tucked beneath her, the mother crawled to the table. How would she ever guess which food was which child?

"In despair, the mother looked in her basket. Here are the things my children wanted, she thought, and

now they will never have them."  
"Hurry!" said the witch, "I'm hungry."  
The mother looked at the food on the table.  
"Speak up!" said the witch. "My supper grows cold!"

Suddenly, the mother knew what to do. Taking the things from her basket, she said, "I know my children by what they want."  
"Bread wants butter. That's Monday."  
"Pie wants knife. That's Tuesday."  
"Milk wants pitcher. That's Wednesday."  
"Porridge wants honey. That's Thursday."  
"fish wants salt. That's Friday."  
"Cheese wants crackers. That's Saturday."  
"And roast rib wants egg pudding. That's Sunday."

Quick as a wink, the children turned back into themselves. They hugged and kissed their mother, then hugged and kissed each other.

Mom loved that the mother in the story saved her children because she knew them. Boy did Mom know each of us kids. It's an amazing thing to be known so well by another person. That's one of the things I miss so much about having her gone. I'd like to be able to call her to confirm what I think:)

Mom's birthday today is a sunny day. We picked up some flowers at the grocery store yesterday for her. Happy birthday, Mom.

### **Happy Easter! (2009-04-08 19:36)**

April 8: Tomorrow morning at 5am, our crew is headed out to the airport to fly to Wichita, Kansas for the weekend. Bryan's grandparents all live there, and we haven't seen them in a year, so it should be really nice to have a visit. Bryan's mom's parents both turn 90 this spring, so we're having a 90th joint birthday party for them on Saturday. I'm looking forward to seeing Bryan's cousins...I may even get to meet some cousins I've never seen before. Andrew is over the moon about seeing everyone. He's an excited boy. In other news, Sylvie has really taken off walking the last couple days. She's walking from one end of the house to the other. There's still lots of falling down, but today walking was definitely her main form of transportation. A toddler!

### **Vomit at 25,000 feet (2009-04-12 19:45)**

April 12: We're back home after spending a wonderful weekend in Wichita visiting with Bryan's parents, Melanie and Ben, and seeing all Andrew and Sylvie's Wichita great-grandparents. I love traveling and visiting people we care about. The hours we get to spend in their company are definitely worth the, er, discomforts of traveling with two small children. And on the flight home, those discomforts were particularly wet and smelly.

Our flights home took us through St. Louis on our way home to Madison. Sylvie isn't the kind of kid who likes to sit still or read books or play with toys, so flights with her are substantially more challenging than they were with Andrew. She cried gustily for a good portion of our first flight. I try to find a zen place and keep her from walloping me in the face with her flailing head. When we're in the airport, though, she's generally great (if she can do whatever she wants). She'll walk (I just wrote crawl, but she's stopped crawling all together now!) from person to person and waves and blows kisses and makes ridiculous faces to make them laugh. So layovers with her are pretty good...if I can keep her from toddling in to the men's restroom without igniting her fury.

Our flight from St. Louis to Madison started out good enough. There was a good-looking guy sitting behind us. And Sylvie loves cute boys. So she spent a good 30 minutes flirting with him by peering up over the top of the seat or by peeking around the side. He was kind enough to engage her. But on our descent into Madison, things really fell apart.

Sylvie had been having a big snack, including drinking lots of water. At one point, she gagged on a piece of a goldfish cracker, and for the first time in her life, she threw up. All over herself. I caught some of the sour-smelling mucousy water in my hand, and we sat there together for a stunned moment, watching the liquid slowly, goo-ily drip down onto my pants.

I glanced over at Bryan, my mind scrambling for an idea about how to clean up this unfolding disaster, and he looks around and hands me the cocktail napkin from under his drink.

A cocktail napkin.

I encouraged him to GET THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT, and when he seemed to be trying to get her attention by hand signals, I said, "This is one of those time when you use that button over your head." Within a moment, she was there with a battalion of cocktail napkins, I was able to empty my hand of its gooey contents. Sylvie's dress was soaked, but I didn't have back-up clothes, so I put my hands under her dress to keep the cold fabric off her skin. It was about that time that she lost it.

I think it was mostly pain-inducing altitude changes that caused her distress. Well, I'm sure that wearing a vomit-soaked dress didn't help. In any case, she was inconsolable for maybe 20 minutes...until we landed.

Andrew was such a sweet big-brother, offering her toys and trying to cheer her, but she was in an eyes-closed, no-cheering-accepted state of mind. Eventually, my boy fell asleep as a coping mechanism.

After we landed, Sylvie cheered up again. The two of us smelled rather sour, however, until we got home and tossed her straight into the tub.

We had a wonderful time. I'm happy to have the traveling part of our vacation behind us once again:) I'm looking forward to a run-of-the-mill, quiet week at home. Stay tuned for a re-cap of our fun times in Wichita!

### **Glorious (2009-04-16 08:49)**

"Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don't have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don't have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we

breathe can be a source of joy."  
Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace is Every Step

April 16: Spring has come at last! We have run around barefoot all day. My first daffodil bloomed. My cats are going insane. Ahh, spring. How I missed you. On Monday I took the kids out to play but had to retreat indoors after a short time because my daughter's hands were turning purple, I was rather grouchy that it could be mid-April and it was still so cold that we couldn't play outdoors even with full winter garb (minus Sylvie's mittens which she won't wear). But today all is forgiven. All my windows are open. And some crocuses that I planted last fall are peeking out of the grass like miniature blades of grass.

I owe lots of pictures, but they are still on my camera. I've been knitting a gift for a very special little girl who is turning one next week. And I'm also preparing a surprise for my blog readers (that's you)!

### **Archives (2009-04-17 08:30)**

[smart\_archives]

### **A trunk, a horn, and hump (2009-04-17 08:53)**

April 17: Andrew's already extensive imagination has bloomed in a new area...animals are living in our house. The other day, Andrew walked into his room, stopped and whispered, "Look! A trunk!" Sure enough. There was an elephant in the closet. His trunk had been sticking out. And he helped Andrew pick out his clothes for the day.

Another time, again in his room, Andrew looked at his bed and his eyes grew round. "A horn!" he exclaimed in reverent wonder. There on his bed was a sleeping deer with a beautiful glowing horn. Andrew and Bryan approached the dreaming creature and carefully pet it while it slumbered.

Soon after, Andrew was walking down the hall when he stopped short, pointed ahead, and cried, "Look, it's a HUMP!" Turns out that a camel was hanging out.

Just now, Bryan told me that upon walking into the sunroom Andrew said, "Uh oh, this is a really scary one. Tiger." Bryan said he was afraid of it, so Andrew kicked it up to the moon.

Oh, and the other morning Andrew informed us that there was a T-Rex, a dragon, and an elephant in his room. "That must be pretty crowded!" I said. "Well, Mommy," Andrew replied, "The T-Rex is asleep on my bed, and the elephant's in the closet." Apparently they've all got it figured out. What a kid!

### **Links (2009-04-17 19:46)**

### **Photo download extravaganza (2009-04-19 08:54)**

April 19: It's Sunday morning. Sylvie is napping. Andrew and Bryan are playing Sequence. I decided to grab this peaceful moment to download the photos on my camera. It's been over a week, and I had 650 images. Yikes. I hadn't downloaded my Wichita photos yet. This is going to be quite a project.

The other night I was up until midnight working to on (drum-roll please) a new platform for this blog. I've been using Mambo for the last four years, but I'm having some serious problems with spam. I'm also kind of unhappy to be working on a platform that is no longer being actively developed. So I'm a-switching to Wordpress. Databases have been created, migration has taken place (with a huge amount of help from my SQL-proficient husband). And I'm going crazy with all the fun widgets available.

Now I'm working to tweak the look of the blog. We still need to migrate comments, but soon when you visit here you'll see a new look. I love developing web pages!

I'll spend the rest of Sylvie's nap splitting my time between photo processing and theme-tweaking. Ahh, bliss:)

### **My website has a new home! (2009-04-20 09:22)**

I'm writing to you from a whole new blogging platform. Over the last couple weeks (thanks to the urging of my brother) I moved my blog from Mambo to Wordpress. It's been a good move. I still have some things I'm tweaking, but I was anxious to invite you all to my new space.

Please let me know if you run into problems or if you have suggestions for improvements. This is way too exciting for me. I've been completely obsessed the last week!

Andrew's watching me type, and he's been pointing out words he recognizes. Sweet kid.

Well, enjoy!

### **Photo insanity (2009-04-22 09:00)**

Now that I've got my WordPress blog up and running about how I want it, I've tried to work on the photo gallery part of my blog. The problem is that since I switched to Gallery2 a year or so ago, it seems like the gallery has worked reeeeaally slowly. And since one of the main purposes of this blog is photosharing, I'm really not OK with it being that slow.





So yesterday I did some research and compared Picasa and Flickr and other photo options, and I decided to switch to Flickr. So I got myself a "pro" account. Next step...move the 6,700 photos from the last four years to Flickr. No small feat!

Today is a fantastically beautiful day. It's Earth Day. Andrew and I should be outdoors planting seeds. But I'm moving photos. And it makes me so happy!

**Photos (2009-04-22 10:00)**

**Photo transfer in progress (2009-04-22 20:00)**

As Bryan and I sat and watched the second episode of John Adams tonight, I moved most of winter and spring 2008 pictures onto Flickr. I'm pretty excited about the archive function on Flickr. You can look photos up by date on a calendar.

All my uploaded albums (called collections on Flickr) can be found here.  
cool!

### **"Let's talk about the ways I love you" (2009-04-23 18:13)**

Andrew is just wonderful. The two of us played "bears" for a half hour tonight. And nearly every word that came out of him made me wish that I was taping him...he's just so beautifully cute.

Our game started as he got out of the tub. He pulled his green froggy robe around himself, looked up at me, and said, "Mommy, let's go snuggle and do toaster on the bed and talk about the ways I love you." Toaster is when we warm him up by hugging him in our winter coats or under the covers.

While we "did toaster," we shared observations about how much we love each other. For a literary comparison, it's kind of like *Quick as a Cricket* meets *Guess How Much I Love You*. For example, Andrew said,

"I love you as many stripes as a zebra has. I love you as high as a giraffe can reach. I love you as hot as Africa. I love you big as a hippo can open his mouth. I love you as many wildebeests that there are on the savanna. I love you as much as a lion's mane."

I replied in kind, and we shared our "I love yous" until we'd exhausted (at least temporarily) our creativity.

Later Andrew requested that we play bears. I'd be the mommy bear and he'd be the little baby bear. I'd still need to protect him from predators, but he could hunt for himself. First he went hunting for a moose. He had to be very careful of the sharp antlers and hooves. He was so delighted that he was able to take down a great big moose all by himself. We devoured it together, spitting out antlers, bones, and fur. For the next half hour, Andrew-bear successfully hunted a manatee, a lion, an octopus (we liked slurping down the tentacles but had to spit out the ink), a (!) blue whale (we called all the other bears to join in), a daddy humpback whale, and an antelope. We also found lots of delicious berries, but we had to watch out for skunks on our berry-forays.

After each meal, we'd crawl back to our den where winter would be coming on and we'd hibernate under the covers together until the smell of berries or the flutter of butterfly wings would wake us up. Baby bear would giggle and kiss Mommy bear's nose to rouse her from her slumber. Then we'd groom each other, pulling the burs out of our thick fur. Andrew-bear decided that he was almost grown, but he wanted to stay with his mommy bear for protection and warmth in the winter. We were very cozy bears during those short winter hibernations.

I feel so lucky to have this sweet boy in my life.

### **Quotes from the universe (2009-04-24 17:27)**

My friend Jessica (who has a knack for finding great things) sent me the following email that she received from The Universe. Made me laugh and smile all day, so I thought I'd share.

There isn't a moment in any day, Jessica, when someone, somewhere, isn't better off because of something you've done.

And no matter what you do, or don't do, with the rest of your life, you cannot now comprehend

the amounts of love, joy, and personal assistance that are already being pressed out to you in gratitude.

Must be nice,  
The Universe

She received this great note from an email subscription. Here's what their website says about their daily notes:

Notes are brief passages written by "The Universe," personalized with your name (and occasionally your personal goals and dreams), designed to remind you that you have, indeed, been given dominion over all things.

Notes from the Universe are unconventional, humorous, deeply insightful, and wildly popular! They're also free and sent out 5 days a week!

TUT's Adventurer's Club sounds like a fun group. I'm always glad to find out about things that make me smile! Let me know if you decide to try them out:)

### **Photomania (2009-04-24 20:52)**

I am totally OCD-ing this whole transfer of photos to Flickr thing. After a couple days of lots of hours, I've moved all 6,000+ pictures. They're all sorted into beautiful collections. You can look up my photos by date! On a calendar! There are oodles of sets (albums) which I am now reorganizing by date. And after some consideration, I've decided to tag my pictures. Because wouldn't it be fun to see all the pictures I have of "crying" or "smiling" or "flowers" or "granny."

This is going to be a long process. Bryan has called into question my sanity and/or preference for free-time activities. But I love my "toes" tag, and I'm looking forward to going through each and every one of those 6,000 pictures. This might take a while...



### **Learning about Spain (2009-04-29 07:25)**

Bryan's parents are on vacation in Spain right now, and we're having fun tracking their travels on Google Maps. Andrew and I spent a little time this morning looking at the terrain and at photos of the areas they are visiting. Today is LuAnn's birthday. I'm hoping they're having a lovely day!

[View Larger Map](#)

### **No more milk for baby? (2009-04-29 08:10)**

In a burst of independence, Sylvia has nearly weaned herself from nursing over the last couple weeks. I'm mostly thrilled, but my heart is a little sad to think that our days of our sweet nursing moments are at an end.



Up until mid-April, she was nursing before both naps, before bed, and at 4:30am. So that was four times a day. Aside from the middle-of-the-night nursing, the other ones were brief...only a minute or two.

About two weeks ago, we decided to wean Sylvie from her nighttime feeding. Bryan was able to go to her at night and get her back to sleep without too much fuss (when she saw me, she really just wanted to nurse!). A surprising side-effect of her nighttime weaning was that she lost interest in daytime nursings as well.

I'm going to Northfield on Friday and Saturday for an Alumni Council meeting at Carleton. I'd been planning on bringing Sylvia with me and finding a college student to watch her. But last weekend, Bryan and I decided that she'd probably be done nursing by the weekend, so she's staying at home with Bryan and Andrew! Her last nursing was yesterday morning. She never asked today. Tomorrow would be her last chance, and then I'll be gone until Sunday morning... wow.

She's growing up so much. I'm really proud of her. Only thing is that she's such an active, on-the-go baby, that my heart aches a little to think that our quiet moments of her snuggled in my arms, looking quietly up into my eyes is at an end. My sweet baby girl. Time is washing over her, and she is toddling...now almost running toward her future.

I'll just have to pick her up while she's sleeping have the chance to hold her still body and stoke her soft skin.

## 5.5 May

### Back from Minnesota (2009-05-03 19:45)

I had a lovely time at Carleton on Friday and Saturday. And today, Sunday, was a beautiful spring day to beat all beautiful spring days. I got home after the kids were in bed last night. Andrew had requested to be awoken, and he came racing down the hall and gave me a flying hug, wrapping his legs around my waist, ankles hooked together behind my back.

Ahh, the smell of my children. I've been drinking it in all day long. My favorite part is the nape of the neck, right where his curls begin. On Sylvie, I think I prefer just behind her ears when I nuzzle my nose there...my lips resting on her beautiful neck.

We spent nearly the entire day outdoors today. I purchased a scarlet oak tree, which Bryan planted in the yard today. I think of it as a memorial tree for my mom and grandparents and others we love who aren't among us anymore. It's a scrawny little sapling right now, but it has a patch of earth now to grow into and call its own.

Bryan mowed for the first time, and he did lots of dandelion picking. Andrew did a bike ride, we washed the minivan, and I transplanted a slew of sunflower seedlings that Andrew planted. When we put the children to bed (after scrubbing the ground-in dirt in the tub), Bryan and I sat on the porch, sipped margaritas, and chatted while we watched the sky turn from sunset to dusk to night. A perfect way to end a delightful night.

While I was driving this weekend, I listened to several episodes of NPR's This American Life. Boy do I love that show. I also really enjoyed hearing several podcasts of This I Believe. One of them that struck a cord was called "Dancing to Connect a Global Tribe." Check it out if you have the chance!

### A little slide show (2009-05-03 21:54)

 [EMBED]

### Last preschool Thursday (2009-05-07 09:17)

I'm sitting on my porch, listening to the cacophony of birds, feeling the sun warm my legs, and feeling a gentle breeze. The maples on our street have finished flowering, and teeny tiny leaves have burst from the buds. Our driveway, sidewalk, and street are covered with spring-green maple flowers. Dandelions have popped out on every lawn, and the kids are having a blast gathering them. Andrew declared (many times) that his favorite color is yellow. (Just so you know, that's true today only.) Tulips are standing proud and colorful, the squirrels and birds are racing around with hormonal frantiness...May, how I love you!

I am particularly enjoying this lovely morning because it is the last Thursday morning that Andrew is in preschool. Sylvie is napping, and I am momentarily free to get work done...or not! I finished tagging all the pictures in Flickr from 2006. Take a spin on my Flickr tags for some fun. Andrew particularly enjoys this exercise. And he's learning to



read a bunch of the words. What a kid!

Andrew had his year-end parent-teacher conference last week, and his teachers just love him. They put together a book with pictures and comments on his growth. It feels so good to have other adults who know...really know...and love my boy. It feels neat to share him with the world and to have him start to go to school and have his own arena in which to flourish. One step in the long letting go process. I couldn't be happier than I am with Monona Grove Nursery School. It's a wonderful place. I highly recommend it! In fact, I've signed up to be on the board next year. Starting in September, Andrew will be going to school three days a week, and Sylvie and I will do a "Toddler Time" on Tuesday mornings. Something to look forward to this fall.

In the last week, we've spent hour upon lovely hour outside. Andrew climbs the tree in our backyard many times each day. We walk to the park, ride bikes, fly kites, and bask in the sunshine. I've been putting Sylvie in sundresses, and the cuteness is almost too much to bear.

Next week, we have some exciting plans. I found plane tickets for \$100 each, so next Wednesday, the kids and I are flying to DC to visit Heather. (Grace and Kacy, hopefully I can see you too!) I'll be in Maryland until the following Tuesday. It's nice to use my unscheduled at-home situation to be able to take a spur-of-the-moment trip! I haven't seen little Evie much this last year (she just turned one!), so it'll be nice to catch-up.

Sylvie has been going to daycare at Donna's house for the last month or so, and it's going really well. There are four other kids there, and they spend lots of time outdoors in their back yard or across the street at the park. Sylvie seems to enjoy it, and it's been great for me and her to have some time on our own.

The little girl is fully weaned now, and in the last few days, she cut her four eye teeth. Due to the teeth situation, she's been up several times in the night recently, but in general she shows no negative repercussions from not nursing. In fact, I asked her to nurse yesterday, and she laughed as if to say, "What a silly thing!" Then she hopped down and trundled out of the room. What a big girl! She's also getting where she can follow directions like, "Can you go pick a yellow flower and bring it to me?" or "Go to your highchair and I'll get you some crackers." She loves swinging at the park and can do so for a long time. She's also just getting where she can go down the slide by herself, and she cracks up when she gets to the bottom. What fun it is to be a girl who is becoming for capable every day!

### **Last day of preschool (2009-05-08 05:55)**

It's another amazing-looking May morning. Bryan is taking Sylvie over to Donna's for the morning, and Andrew is getting dressed for his last day of preschool. He's decided to ride his bike (named Brisinger) to school today.



I don't have a gift for his teachers. Must still think of something on that front...

Last week, I had a parent-teacher conference with Sue and Emily. They really love him, and Andrew's temperament is a great fit for school. They put together a really touching book outlining the ways Andrew has grown over the year. He helped me scan it in to the computer, and I have it posted here for your reading pleasure. It's about 10MB to download...

Hope your day is a delightful one!

### **You'll have to finish that doughnut before...** (2009-05-10 13:02)

Sometimes when I'm speaking to my children, I pause and listen to the words that just came out of my mouth and sort of shake my head. Like yesterday morning, we were all enjoying some doughnuts for breakfast. Bryan brought home left-overs from work on Friday, so Saturday morning saw us all enjoying the yummy treats. Andrew likes to eat doughnuts (and cupcakes and anything else with frosting) by licking or nibbling the frosting off, leaving a nearly untouched bakedgood underneath. After pulling this trick and diving in for more, we said, "Andrew, you'll have to finish all of your doughnut before you can have another one." And then we looked at each other with wonder,

questioning, "Did I just say that?"

Have a carrot!



### Wonderful Mother's Day (2009-05-10 17:08)

Bryan and the kids arranged for a simply divine Mother's Day today. I feel so lucky to have been pampered and tended to all day long.



Sylvie woke up at 5:30 this morning. I think she wanted me to watch the sun rise. But after she spent a cranky 45 minutes, I put her back to bed and (thanks to Bryan) stayed in bed myself until almost 8. How I do love my bed. I don't think I spent enough time with it these days.

Andrew made me a painted flower pot at preschool, Sylvie made me a finger-printed jar at Donna's and Andrew and Bryan went out the other day and got me a flat of beautiful flowers for my garden. What lovely gifts!

I took Sylvie for a nice walk this morning. It's been a beautiful, cool day. The leaves are filling out on all the trees, and the world is full of hundreds of colors of green. Sylvie gets so calm on walks, and she just sat and gazed around while we strolled.

We went to Olbrich Gardens this afternoon, after which we stopped at Michael's Custard for my free strawberry sundae. mmmmm

Bryan entertained the kids and cooked dinner while I planted my new flowers. What a lovely evening! Bryan made me lasagna and garlic bread, which is my favorite meal that my mommy would make me. It was a delicious treat.

Happy Mother's Day to all you lovely mothers out there. I hope you feel special and loved!

I've got loads of pictures from the last several weeks that I'm going to process and upload tonight. Stay tuned!

### **Carpe Diem Party! (2009-05-11 19:45)**

In honor of the tradition that Margot started, you are invited to a Carpe Diem Party

Saturday, May 23 r

d

11am - 3pm

At the Token Creek Park shelter #5 (directions)

Pot luck, bring your favorite dish to share.

We'll have Frisbees, balls, and stories from the past year, pictures from Maretta and Kyle's wedding, the engaged couple Michael and Lisa, adorable Andrew and Sylvia, and more!

Let's get together, remember those we love who are no longer with us, and enjoy a beautiful spring day together.

Carpe Diem!!!!



**We're in Maryland! (2009-05-14 11:25)**

The kids and I flew in to Baltimore on Wednesday morning, and we're currently all settled in at Heather's house for the week. At the moment, Sylvie is (at long last) napping, Andrew is playing quietly on his own, Evelyn (Heather's one-year-old) is at daycare, and Heather is at an appointment.



We're here until next Tuesday, so I'm looking forward to seeing Grace, Tim, and John and hopefully Kacy and Reutiger.

It's summery here in Maryland. The temps yesterday felt downright hot, and another summer storm is blowing through today.

My boy is back at home, hopefully enjoying some quiet time. He's got plans to be productive while we're gone, but I'd be happy to have him rest and enjoy a week of calm. Bryan's birthday is on Sunday, so feel free to drop him a note to tell him how great you think he is!

Oops, Andrew just dropped a toy on the floor, and I imagine I'll hear a peep from Sylvie in a moment. There she goes.

OK, I'm off. Take care while we're gone!

**Whoa (2009-05-15 17:07)**

It's a quiet evening here at Heather and Michael's house. We stuck close to home today and made some birthday treats for Michael. Heather made him a 6-foot-tall stuffed giant squid and a giant squid carrot cake. Photos will be forthcoming. Grace had the afternoon off work for her birthday (it's birthday madness here, I tell you!), so she came over and the two of us took Sylvie and went downtown for some window-shopping and ice cream consuming.





After Michael came home from work and we surprised him with his squid items, he and Heather went out for dinner. Having me here for a week provides a good opportunity for them to get out for a birthday treat. They asked one of their friends to come over while I put the kids to bed to help out. Turns out that one adult for the three of these kids was a tough ratio.

Sylvie only napped for an hour today, and she found repeated reasons to tantrum. Evie was feeling very fragile and unsure. Then she spilled a glass of water on herself, and she became pretty sure that indeed, things in her world were not at all right. What with Sylvie's screaming, Andrew started yelling and crying (at one point sobbing, "I don't know WHYYYY I'm CRYYYINGG!"). I tried taking Andrew and Evie to a different room, but they were not to be soothed, so then I tried holding both girls, but Sylvie was flailing her head like a battering ram. It didn't last for more than a half-hour or so, but it sure did make me relieved that I haven't had twins! Heather's neighbor came over and found me in Evie's bedroom with a sobbing Evie in my arms and a writhing Sylvie between my legs on the floor. The two of us tried to bathe the girls, aborted that mission due to the continued sadness, and got them quickly to bed. Fortunately, they both went down in a snap.

Poor Evelyn. It was a tough 45 minutes for her.

After putting Andrew to bed, I finished off my pint of Ben & Jerry's (Half Baked) and plopped down with the laptop. There's so many dishes to do, but I'm going to ignore them for a while and catch up on my not-doing-anything while enjoying silence time. Sleep, babies, sleep.

**Failure to communicate (2009-05-16 07:24)**

What we've got here is a failure to communicate.

Cool Hand Luke

Sylvie's emotions run pretty fast and thick. As she flips around in my arms in yet another sudden fit of anger, I often have the above line run through my head.

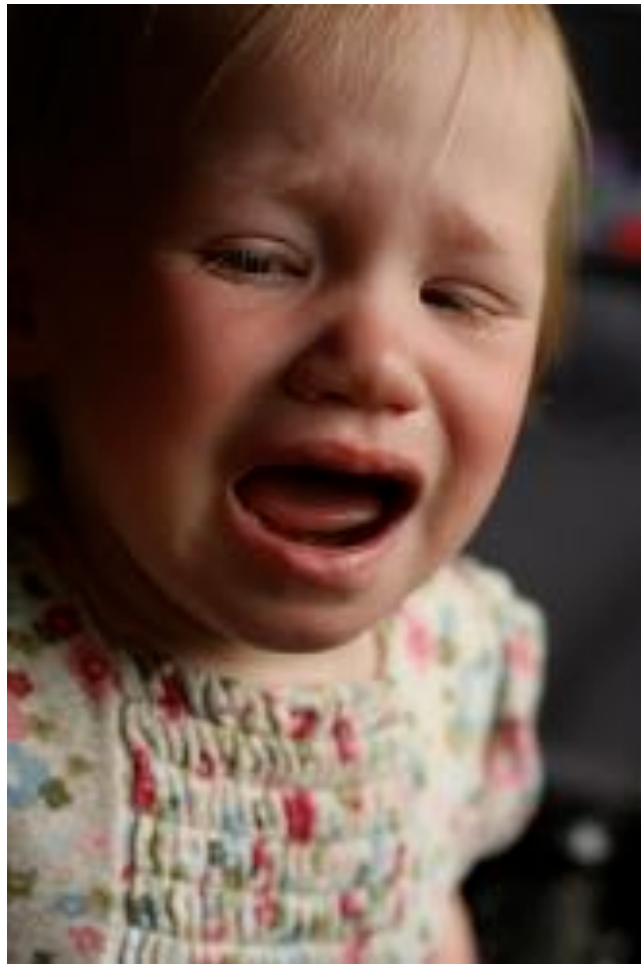


I'm really hoping that this year we can work on communication a lot. Granted, most of the time I know what she wants. She's great at pointing, she nods and shakes her head. She says, "Maaa MA!" in different tones to indicate preference. She also starting to try out different sounds sometimes. Like, "Baabaa" meant stream or water the other day. She was entranced by Sligo Creek and shouted "Baaabaa" whenever she saw it. She also may have said "CraCa" for cracker last week. And there've been a couple words that slip my mind that she's tried out in the last couple days.

But in general, if things aren't going her way, or if she's tired and I guess wrong about what she wants, she gets, er, really mad. Really mad. And it's hard to calm her down for quite some time. Sometimes I know what she wants and I don't want her to do it. In those cases, it's also very hard to calm her down.



We went to a park early this morning with Andrew, Evelyn, and Sylvie. Sylvie had two lengthy, loud, and un-stoppable tantrums before we called it a day. I think she was just too tired since yesterday she only took a 45 minute nap. But when she's in that angry place, I can't talk her down. I'm hoping that maybe as she develops language skills that we might have an extra tool to deal with those kinds of situations. For Sylvie, when the floodgates of anger and frustration open, it's hard for that little girl to find a way to turn off the tap.



Eventually, she nearly fell asleep in my arms, and right now she's taking a nap. She's been having a relatively hard time here on our trip. Usually it seems like new environments stimulate her in a fun and exciting way, but she's had few happy, joyful moments here so far. Two big exceptions are when we play in the sandbox, in the kiddie pool, or in the tree swing.

Oops, she's calling now!

Wish us luck.

Post Nap Update: Sylvie woke up in a glorious mood. She had a snack, and she's been full of dimples and smiles and sweet curls. She loves Pippin the dog, and she's giving kisses and hugs to everyone. What a difference a nap can make!



### **Welcome home! (2009-05-19 08:40)**

I love the way the sun slants in the windows of my home.

This morning at 8am, Bryan picked up the kids and me from the Milwaukee airport. It's a stunningly beautiful spring day here in Wisconsin, and my garden and yard are looking so beautiful...a perfect welcome home.

Walking through our home, everything feels so right. I had a wonderful time with Heather and Micahael and Evelyn. I loved getting to visit with Grace and Tim and John. If Bryan had been able to join us, I could have stayed in DC for quite some time. I was also thinking it would be fun to just take off and explore the world. Let's go to Turkey or Russia or Bali! But coming home feels good too. There's a contentment in my heart at the feeling of being home. I should have posted earlier to report that Sylvie's outlook improved dramatically on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. She started napping, and suddenly she was smiling and laughing and flirting again. I have a positively ridiculous number of pictures to share from our trip, so I'm going to upload those and then I'll post about our trip.

In sum, it was lovely. Andrew had a wonderful time. He loved spending time with our friends. I so enjoyed having the opportunity to spend some time with people who are dear to me, and I just delighted in the opportunity to get to know the one and only Evelyn Rose Lerner. She's an absolutely amazing little girl.

Hope your day is a good one!

## Maryland vacation (2009-05-19 12:46)

What a lovely time we had visiting our friends in the DC area! Pictures are in the gallery. Last week, Heather and I were chatting about how much we missed getting to know each other's girls as they've grown from babies to toddlers this past year.



Heather mentioned that there were really cheap (read \$100) plane tickets from Milwaukee to Baltimore, but the sale ended that night. So Bryan and I had some quick conversations, and I found myself on a flight one week later!

Sylvie had a really hard time on the flight. Her ears must have been killing her, because boy, was she miserable on the descent. As I've mentioned in earlier posts, our first few days were fun but rather rough in the Sylvie department due to a lack-of-nap issue. We stayed pretty close to home and visited some beautiful local parks and playgrounds. The kids had fun in a kiddie pool, sand box, and baby swing; and Pippin-the-dog was a constant source of amusement for Sylvia.

On Saturday, Sylvie started napping again, and we started enjoying some fun interactions between her and Evelyn. My dear friend Kacy and her new husband, Ruediger have just bought a new home. In fact, they've only just moved in over the last week! Heather, the kids, and I headed over to Kace's house on Saturday, and we had a lovely time exploring their new home and enjoying each other's company for a couple hours. Kace has lived in the same



one room apartment for the last (I'm guessing) eight years, so a big house is a big (and I'm sure welcome) change! Seeing Kace again makes me wish our paths crossed much more regularly. Our times together are such fun!



On Sunday, we got the baby girls dressed up in sweet outfits and headed to downtown Takoma Park to take part in a free mini-photo shoot at a chic baby boutique. The photographer got a few nice shots of Andrew and Sylvia together, so when we get the proofs in a couple weeks, I'll see if there are any worth purchasing! With the girls in their cute clothes, I had to snap a few shots of my own...



On Sunday afternoon, the Lerner's and I headed over to Grace and Tim and John's house for a BBQ. We did a sing-along, hung out, made dinner, and in general had a lovely time. My friend Lara came over too! What a lovely afternoon. That evening, we stayed at Grace and Tim's. Andrew and John had a sleep-over in John's room together. The giggling that came out of that room was really something to hear. <snicker snicker> <giggggggllllleee!!!!> <snortle snortle> When Grace came in to tell them to quiet down, she heard a mad rush of boys jumping back in bed as she came down the hall. Eventually I had to emulate my mom and sit in a rocking chair to enforce silence. Such cute boys! They really had fun playing together. Tim and Grace and John are coming out to visit us July 1-5. I'm already looking forward to it!



On Monday morning, Heather, the kids and I headed downtown to go to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. What a place! It's a beautiful museum. We got to see preserved giant squids, dino bones, and we even got tickets to a special butterfly exhibit.



Heather and Michael are part of a dinner co-op, and Monday was their day to cook, so in the afternoon, Heather and I cooked up a meal for four families (three plus ourselves). We delivered the meals as the sun set (Andrew insisted on me carrying him on my back, and Sylvie wouldn't ride in the stroller, so it was a strenuous walk!). That evening, Heather finished making a reversible dress for Sylvie. Evie is going to have a matching one...so cute!



Overall, the week flew by. As I looked back at pictures, it was hard to believe that so much time had gone by! I feel really lucky to have gotten to spend time with good friends. We had lovely and generous hosts, and now I'm chalk full of fresh memories and conversations from our time together. Thanks everyone! I can't wait to see you

again soon:)



#### **Sylvie's 15-month check-up (2009-05-21 11:40)**

What a stunning May day! I am a bit sheepish to admit that we (Andrew, Terry, and I) are spending some of it indoors watching ... you guessed it...Godzilla. Mothra vs. Godzilla actually. Meanwhile Sylvie is crying in her crib instead of napping. She's had some troubles with her naps again, poor girl.



This morning Sylvie had her 15-month doctor's appointment. In addition to a couple vaccinations (chicken pox this time), I got an update on her vitals. So here they are...drumroll please!

- Height: 31" (64 %)
- Weight: 20 lbs 7.5 oz (14 %)
- Head circumference: 46.8cm (74 %)

Her weight has gone down percentage-wise a bit this time. She's been more in the 25 %, but it's all relative! Height has held steady in the 60-70 percentile.

She eats like a horse, but she doesn't like to drink much milk. Apparently most babies her age drink 2-3 cups of milk each day. I think she normally drinks a few ounces at most. Her doctor said I could give her chocolate milk if I wanted to encourage her to drink more milk, but I think that seems a little odd. She loves yogurt and cottage cheese and cheddar, so I think she's getting good nutrients.

Baby's growing big!

#### **New favorite song (2009-05-22 17:31)**

Every morning for the last week, I've been putting on a new CD as we eat breakfast and get ready in the morning. It's called Bottle of Sunshine by Milkshake. My favorite song goes like this (listen to it on CDBaby):

I can't wait for the day to begin (come on birdies start singing early)  
I get dressed up and call my friends (worms wiggling, everybody's giggling)  
it's time to get out and play...where do we go today?  
I got a big bottle of sunshine  
mixed it up with a bowl of daydreams  
poured it into a suitcase full of laughter that I found  
you won't find me sitting around...

I especially like it when Andrew sings our songs. It's so cute to hear his little voice humming or singing a tune to himself!

### **You're invited! (2009-05-22 17:39)**

May 23 8:45 am update: It's raining, so you may be wondering about the status of today's party at Token Creek Park. I've checked the weather, and it looks like there is a 40 % chance of showers throughout the day. We've reserved a shelter, so I'm giving the party a thumbs-up for going despite the less than picnic-y weather. Hope to see you there! 11am-3pm.

I probably should have re-posted this earlier in the week, but for those of you who check my blog on Friday night or Saturday morning, this is an open invitation for you to join us at Token Creek Park Shelter #5 on Saturday, May 23 for a Carpe Diem party. Bring the kids, bring some food, hang out on the playground or play frisbee. We'll be at the park from 11-3.

Seems like we missed some important people in our email invite, so if you're reading this, please consider coming!!

Here's directions and a link to my earlier post. Hoping for good weather and hoping to see you there!





### **Being home (2009-05-23 08:47)**

It's been nice to be home again this week. I do love our home! And May, sweet beautiful May. How do I love thee? There are singing birds, flowers, warm weather, cool evenings, some soft rains, lots of gardening and basking in the sun. It's got to be my favorite month. But don't tell October.

We've kept busy since getting home on Tuesday.

We had our third-to-the-last Music Together class on Wednesday. That's been such a fun class to take! Sylvie just loves it, and we have such fun singing the songs at home and in the car. It's been a really nice part of our weeks this spring. Tom came over for lunch, and we all biked down to the yellow slide park. The oak leaves are just coming out, and they look all olive colored and small. While we were gone, the field of dandelions turned from yellow to white. Sylvie was sleepy, so she dozed in the swing while I pushed her (for nearly an hour!). Afterward we biked to Java Cat for some gelato. I can safely say that Sylvie is a fan.

Bryan has started his summer sand volleyball games, so on Tuesday nights, he's having fun hanging out with his old co-workers from Widen and playing some v-ball.

On Thursday after Sylvie's doctor's appointment, Terry came over and spent the afternoon with us. We haven't seen him since early April since he's been exploring Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, etc. by car. He filled his blog with beautiful photos from his trip if you'd like to peruse them.

Andrew was delighted to see Terry, and together they watched the movie Mothra and then the kids played in our backyard kiddie pool. Boy, do those kids have fun splashing in the water! Terry brought over Bosco, but I think that's going to be the subject of a separate post.

I've been fighting a head-cold all week, and last night it got the better of me. I fell asleep at 7pm. This morning, I went to the pharmacy and told the pharmacist to help me find something to help my symptoms. I've been pregnant or nursing for much of the last five years, so now that I'm not, I want drugs to make my symptoms go away!! The drugs have worked, and I've been much less coughy, snorty, and phlemy. Lovely.

We got together with Dad this morning and went to the memorial place to look for stones for Mom's headstone. I know, I know...it's rediculously late. But we're planning something really nice. I picked a few loads of lilacs from Dad's backyard (he's got orioles back there!), and Andrew had some fun playing with Dad's marble run.

After that, I picked up Sylvie from daycare at Donna's, and the three of us went to the new Daisy Cafe and Cupcakery to have lunch with Karen. It's a cute place...located where Bunky's used to be. My omlet was delicious. Andrew and Sylvie liked the pancakes. Karen said that her non-meatloaf was good. The service was sloooow. It was noisy. And kind of crowded. And while Lazy Jane's can be crowded and I'm fine, this somehow felt a little less-fun-crowded. Then the cupcakes. They were good. But honestly, not amazing. There was a lot of frosting. Normally, I feel like the more frosting the better, but this was a lot. And they were a little more sweet than I would normally go. And I like sweet. But the strawberry frosting was very berry, which was good. Andrew licked all his frosting off, and Sylvia ate most of hers. I think they approved.

In the afternoon, Vicki and Alex stopped by. The boys played in our pool together in their undies and had a wonderful time. They'd curl up in the towels to warm up and then jump back in the pool. Sylvie's Poodle Nose got soaked, which led to some bedtime unhappiness, but in general a lovely time was had by all.

Now I'm off to the grocery store to get ingredients for the Carpe Diem party tomorrow. If it's as beautiful tomorrow as it was today, it'll be a great party! Yay, it's the weekend!

### **Gather ye rosebuds while ye may (2009-05-23 18:23)**

Today's Carpe Diem party was a lot of fun! Photos are in the photo gallery. The weather cooperated nicely, and it was great to see some friends and family we don't get to see enough. If you couldn't make it this year, don't fret! We intend to make this an annual Saturday of Memorial Day weekend event. So pencil it in for May 29, 2010. Michael and Lisa will bring wedding pictures :)

I was thinking about our title for the party...Carpe Diem. Seize the day. My mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer four years ago on Memorial Day weekend. One year later, we celebrated with our first Carpe Diem party. Mom had beaten many, many odds and had had a successful surgery at Mayo Clinic. She was feeling well, and that party offered a great opportunity to celebrate and to thank some of the many people who had come to our family's aid after her diagnosis. I liked the name Carpe Diem. It's a bit of a family motto.

One of the things I really admire about my mom is that after her diagnosis, she told me that she never had a wave of regret of not having spent time on the important things in life. She didn't find herself suddenly wishing she had savored life's sweetness...because she tried hard to soak it in every day.

Mom was often pointing out to me a beautiful moon (she liked calling me when I was in a different state because we could both look at a pretty moon together). She adored the crisp green that weeping willows turn in the spring, the smell of cornfields after a sunny August day, the feel of milkweed silk, the startling brightness of the world

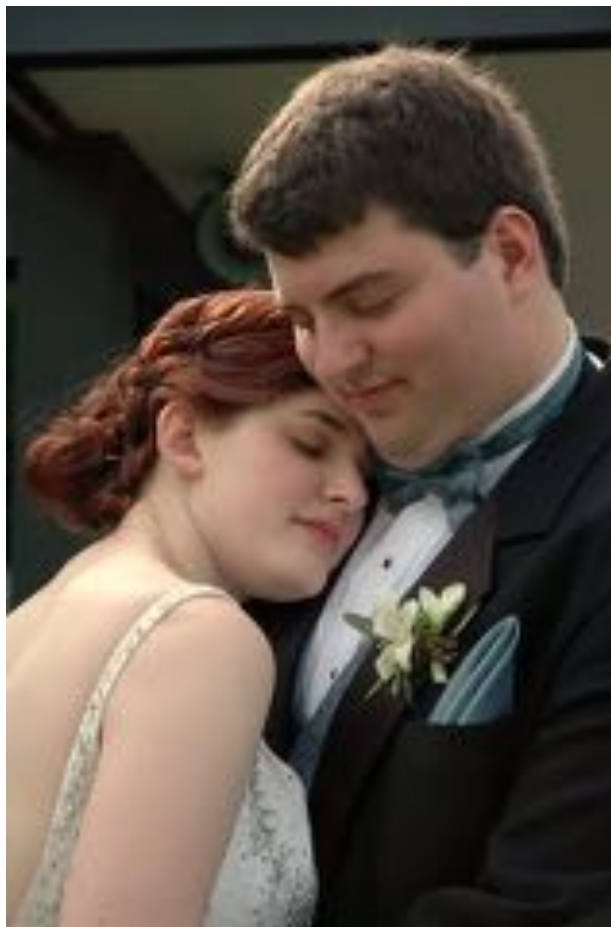
after an ice storm.

At Mom's funeral, Terry read a passage from one of her favorite plays (Our Town). That captures some of the yearning my mom had to appreciate the moment. I found our favorite segment from Dead Poet's Society where Robin Williams encourages his students to "gather ye rosebuds while ye may." I've copied it below.

I hope this Memorial Day weekend you find ways to sieze the day, to hold tight to this life that we hold so dear, and to make your lives (even a little) extraordinary.

**1st Anniversary (2009-05-24 19:32)**

Happy first wedding anniversary to my dear, sweet, beautiful sister and her wonderful husband!



Hard to believe that your wedding was a year ago. What a wonderful day!



So glad we got to spend May 24th together again this year. We love you guys!

**New pics (2009-05-24 20:59)**

I've uploaded some new pictures to the gallery.



You'll find:

- Pictures from a zoo outing to celebrate young Wyatt's 4th birthday
- Playing in the kiddie pool
- Swinging on our (moved) tree swing (the swing moved, not the tree)
- The Carpe Diem party
- Maretta and Kyle
- Pictures from our day of outdooriness today

Enjoy!

## **Althea Dotzour Photography (2009-05-27 09:27)**



I've decided to turn my passion for photography into a bit more than a hobby. Starting in June, I'll be launching Althea Dotzour Photography. I'll be specializing in natural light portrait photography of children and families. I've gotten a lot of experience photographing kids, and I just love capturing their individual personalities in an image.

I feel excited and a little nervous to be starting this new endeavor. In the next weeks, I'll be developing a website, picking a printing lab, deciding on a pricing structure, and polishing my business plan. That said, I will start scheduling photo shoots in June, so if you're interested, let me know! (My business calendar is available online.)

For a sampling from my portfolio, [click here!](#)

## **Eli's birthday (2009-05-30 06:52)**

My boy's friends are turning four! Wyatt's birthday was May 12, and we had a fun day at the zoo celebrating (photos in the gallery). On Monday this week, Eli turned four, and we had a fun time playing at a park in Monona. There were four boys in capes zipping around, climbing, throwing things in the lake, eating ice cream, jumping, and generally having a great time. Photos are in the gallery.





It's amazing to look at the big, beautiful, amazing boys that they are and to remember how sweet and little and babyish they used to be. See [here](#) or [here](#) for examples!

Eli's birthday party is this afternoon. The weather is a little rainy right now, but hopefully the sun will come out and it will be a lovely afternoon. Four years old. Wow. Andrew turns four on June 22. It's all pretty crazy. The wonderful part is that they are all turning into such incredible little people. Makes me excited to find out what happens next!



## 5.6 June

### **Airplane! (2009-06-01 11:31)**

Sylvia is very aware of airplanes these days. Very aware. And we have a remarkable number of airplanes pass over our house. I remember this from when Andrew was her age. As these little people become able to share information, suddenly they notice - and point out - so many things that I would never have seen.

So every hour or so, Sylvie runs over to me, somewhat anxiously calling, "MaaMAA Maaa MA!" She is holding her finger to her ear (the sign for "hear"). She hears an airplane. She's excited and a little worried and usually wants to climb on my lap while I share with her that I too hear the airplane. If we're outside we look for it. If we're inside, we point out the window together. Once the noise has passed, she climbs down and resumes her activities.

So sweet, so fleeting. These days of early communication and discovery are really wonderful.

### Beer Fest 2009 (2009-06-01 21:00)

Michael, Lisa, and Joe just departed our house after a fun and laughter-filled evening that we dubbed Beer Fest. When Joe got home from Sri Lanka last week, he mentioned to Bryan that he'd like to try some beers. Now that he's 21, he wanted to see if he could find a beer he likes (since in general, he - like me - thinks that beer tastes disgusting). Bryan got right to work, and this evening, we tried 12 kinds of beer. Bryan even made up a rating sheet for each of us as well as a write-up describing each type of beer.



So what are our favorites, you ask? Here they are:

- Bryan: India Pale Ale
- Michael: Oatmeal Stout
- Lisa: English Ale
- Joe: Honey Wheat
- Althea: Doppelbock

We had a great evening sitting around sipping beers, being disgusted by some, intrigued by others, and surprised by more. Many peanuts and corn nuts were consumed. Much laughter ensued.

It feels so nice to have Joe back home for the summer! He had his first day at Senator Miller's office today.

Next week he starts his second job at Gathering Waters. If you know of a car he can use for the summer, let him know. Otherwise, he's takin' the bus!



We may have a follow-up to Beer Fest entitled Rootbeer Fest. mmmm root beer. floats. mmmmmm

### **Godzilla!!! (2009-06-02 13:03)**

I haven't mentioned much about Andrew's all-consuming obsession - Godzilla. Back in April, Terry brought over a boxed set of five monster DVDs. Since that time, my young son has been able to think of little else. He wakes up, crawls into bed, and sleepily says, "Good morning, Mommy Mothra." As he falls asleep at night, it's hard to get him to stop talking about, "What if the laavee sprayed Godzilla with webby stuff and then Godzilla went into the ocean?"

The names of these crazy monsters flow off his tongue as easily as the names of family members. Kumunga. Mothra. Manilla. Gamera. Rodan. Mechagodzilla. Manda. The "laavee" (Mothra larvae). Gorosaurus. He spends a lot of time considering who would be which monsters. "If I was Godzilla, Sylvie would be Rodan, you could be Mothra, Daddy would be Gamera..."



We watch at least one of these movies every day. In fact, Terry just added a new DVD (Destroy All Monsters) to the mix, which Andrew is watching right now. What a crazy thing!

Andrew has developed a bit of a secret body language to show how he feels about the ending of different movies. He apparently doesn't like it when Godzilla wins. When the other guys win at the end (like the Montra larvae), Andrew blinks his eyes to show that he his pleased. However, if Godzilla wins at the end (like in Mechagodzilla), he's unhappy and conveys his displeasure by crossing his arms and frowning. He's spent quite some time explaining this system to me, Bryan, and anyone else who will listen.

In general, I've set up deal with Andrew that I don't watch the monster movies with him. They are something that he watches with Dad or someone else at the end of the day. Andrew has determined that "Mommy isn't a fan of Godzilla." However, "Daddy, Terry, and Uncle Bubba are fans of Godzilla. So boys must like Godzilla and girls don't. Except for teeny tiny girls like Sylvia. She likes Godzilla."

I've had some mild concern about exposing my little boy to a sometimes violent monster movie (I mean they are regularly destroying Tokyo, a few people plummet to their death, there's ample use of rockets, in one movie, the small boy gets kidnapped), but he seems as imaginative and as sensitive as ever. And he loves it!

Plus, there's this photo. It's not of Andrew...it's Bryan. A love of Godzilla seems to run in the family.



Bryan was talking to his dad the other day and told him that he was going to spend the evening watching Godzilla with Andrew. "You're so lucky," Bryan's dad replied. "There's nothing like getting to watch a monster movie with your best buddy."

I'm glad that our little guy gets to discover some of the fun things in this world. Upon looking online, I've learned that there are lots more Godzilla movies out there. My boy's thirst for Godzilla and all things monster could be satisfied for quite some time!

**How this Godzilla craze began (2009-06-03 06:22)**

Andrew loves Terry's iPhone.





Several months ago, Terry started sharing YouTube videos with Andrew. They watched (the somewhat questionable) Trunk Monkey. Terry has downloaded dozens of silly or crazy apps onto his iPhone for Andrew to play with. But their favorite. Their very favorite of all was the YouTube video of Godzilla. I've copied it below so you can have this wonderful movie in your life too.

### **Birthday cake considerations (2009-06-05 06:01)**

As we were eating breakfast this morning, I asked Andrew what kind of theme he thought he'd like for his birthday party. His birthday is coming up on June 22 (party on the 27th)...as he tells anyone we meet.

Andrew thought that since his party is going to be at a beach that maybe he'd like a purple triangle cake and have sand toys, and "that would be good!"

I said that would be fine, but I'd been thinking of things he likes a lot, and maybe he would like a cake made like something he likes. "For example," I said, "you really like animals. And you love dinosaurs. We could make you a cake shaped like a dinosaur. Or then there's Godzilla..." "YES!" shouted Andrew. "Godzilla and Godzilla's son Manilla and three-head and some trees that they eat on."

(By the way, Andrew's sitting on my lap as I type, and he was able to read most of that last sentence!)

I'm going to delegate, enlist, and in other ways ask Granny to make Andrew's vision come to cake.

"Yup, that'll be good!" said Andrew.

### **Happy tree (2009-06-05 11:34)**

The maple tree in our front yard is bedecked with ropes. There's Andrew's rope swing, Andrew's climbing rope, and now Sylvia's baby swing. Makes me smile to look at all the white strings dangling down from the tree's limbs. I was wondering whether the tree might feel sloppy and encumbered or whether it's the envy of the other neighborhood trees. I think it's probably happy to be loved.

I, for one, am loving this weather that allows us to spend so many hours playing out in the yard!

### **Althea Dotzour Photography is up and running (2009-06-05 12:29)**

I've done a handful of photo sessions in the last week. My goal was partly to enlarge my portfolio, but it was also to make sure that I would enjoy doing photo sessions as a business. I can safely say that I'm loving it!



I'm going to be creating a business website in the next couple weeks. In the meantime, my portfolio is here. After this weekend, I'll be ready to start taking clients! If you'd like to book an early photo session, drop me a note at [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com)! My prices are going to start low, so booking a session in June or July will be your best deal. Also, if you know anyone who might like a portrait session, please pass along my info to them. Thanks!

Here's some of my favorite images from the last couple weeks.















### **Camp out! (2009-06-06 13:58)**

Andrew's been camping in his room for the last several weeks. His preschool had a camping unit, and the tent they pitched in the classroom was a huge hit with the kids. I thought it would be fun for Andrew to get some practice camping at home, so we put up my tent in his room. He alternates between it and his bed. It's cute to hear him unzip it at night when he gets up to use the bathroom!

Last night, we moved his tent out to our back yard. My suggestion was that he and I have a camp-out in the back yard together, but he decided that he wanted to camp on his own. So last night after his bath and story, Bryan walked him out to the back yard and tucked him in to the tent. We set up a baby monitor so we could keep an ear on him.

He did great! He slept straight through the night and crawled into bed with me at 5:30 (it's pretty light and the birds are pretty chirpy about then). What a cute kid! He's got lots of plans for future camp-outs. If you want to

join us, let me know!

### **I'm giddy about getting to work! (2009-06-09 12:33)**

Jessica watched my children all morning, and I got to have some blessedly uninterrupted time to work on my photography business website. I was having so much fun I was nearly trembling.

I've decided to get started by creating a website that functions but isn't super special and upgrade to something flashier if I'm profitable.

I've also taken steps toward being able to accept credit card payments, and I set up a Quickbooks (accounting) profile.

YAY!!! I've gotten a Wisconsin seller's permit, and I have a several photo sessions scheduled for the next week. I think I'm almost in business!

### **First x-ray (2009-06-10 08:46)**

We had a bit of undesired excitement this morning. As Bryan and I were having breakfast and coffee, Andrew and Sylvie were (I thought) playing in Andrew's room. Sylvie's ear-splitting shriek brought me running down the hall where I discovered her finger was closed in the hinge-side of Andrew's bedroom door. I opened the door to release her bleeding, dented, munched index finger. ohhh dear.



Bryan called the doctor's office while I cleaned and comforted the little miss. She calmed down after a few minutes and would touch her index fingers together (the sign for "hurt") and then she'd point concernedly at her left finger. Her finger had a big, purple dent, and the knuckle was kind of off to the side. After about an hour (when we were at Urgent Care), it had returned to a normal shape but was very swollen. My poor, sweet little girl.

She was a smiling, laughing champ at the doctor's office. We looked at the fish, she made friends with all the other patients, and when she got her x-rays, she sat on my lap and held perfectly still, charming the pants off the x-ray technicians. In fact, they said she was the best little person they'd had.

Right now, Sylvia is saying, "Whooooooooo!!! Whooooooooo!" She's liking owls a lot these days. Just like little Evelyn:)

By the time we were back in the exam room to hear the results of the x-rays, Sylvia had started using her left finger to pick up bits of cereal. Her finger was still large, but the swelling had gone down. The doctor said that she didn't see any sign of a break. She said that kid's bones are still developing and are quite flexible compared to adult bones. Therefore they can get kinda munched (say in a door!) and not break. aack

The doctor tried splinting Sylvie's index and middle fingers together, but she pulled it off right away. A radiologist is going to look at her x-rays this afternoon, and we'll hear from them to confirm that there's nothing the doctor and x-ray techs missed.

So now I'm pulling my shaky mama heart back together, wrapping up my litney of appologies to Sylvie, reminding myself that accients happen, and being thankful that things turned out as well as they did. Hopefully Andrew learned a good lesson about the dangers of doors. I've been reminded what a trooper Sylvie can be.

Hopefully we can put this craziness behind us and move forward to enjoy a fun day!

### **Photo session bliss (2009-06-12 09:05)**

I am just back home after running around and doing a smile-enducing photo session with Jessica and Mitch and family. I really want to download the images right now, but I've got about an hour to work on my business website, and I will not be distracted! Last night I met Andrew's pal Minna at Tenney Park, and we did a lovely photo session while she and her moms climbed on the rocks, played on the playground, and were all silly and fun together. What a great family!

I think my favorite part of this whole photography business is that I get invited to see and capture the interactions and the personalities that make each family unique. My heart fills up each time I'm able to connect with someone and gain their trust so they open up and share a bit of themselves with me and my camera. Oh, and I love love love looking through images from a photo session and finding those gems. Maybe the child is gazing off with a contemplative look or the whole family is rolling around during a rockus tickle session. Examples from my profile are on Flickr. This is so much fun!!

I've got an opening next Wednesday evening (June 17) if anyone out there wants to have photos taken this month, that's a good option!

### **Summer night at APT (2009-06-14 13:33)**

Summer has officially started in my world. Last night, Bryan and I went to a play at American Players Theater. It felt so nice to be back in Spring Green, seeing the familiar picnic tables, having a lovely dinner outside, hiking up the hill to the theater. I have plans to attend quite a few plays at APT this summer. It's always been one of the highlights of summer in Wisconsin.

We saw the opening night of Comedy of Errors, and it made us laugh and laugh. I take Bryan's mom and sister out to APT in a couple weeks, and the week after that, I'm taking Grace and Tim! (Oh, by the way, Grace, I got us tickets to a play.) Today was hot enough for Andrew to play on his Slip n' Side. Hello summer!

### **Strawberrrry Jam (2009-06-15 13:49)**

Mmmmmmm. Did you know that jam can require four cups of sugar for every two cups of mashed strawberries? I was a little shocked. But the results... Mmmmm the results. Excuse me, I think some spilled on the kitchen counter and needs to be cleaned, er, licked up.

### **Preschool '09-'10 (2009-06-17 09:29)**

I just got a packet of information in the mail from Monona Grove Nursery School. Andrew is signed up for class on MTW in the mornings from 8:45-11:45. And his teachers...drum roll please...are Gail & Debbie. I met them both the other night, and they seem like really sweet people.

Sylvia is also signed up for a class at Monona Grove Nursery School this fall. They have something called Toddler Time, and she's signed up for the Tuesday class. I attend along with her, and the sessions run two hours. Starting this summer, Sylvie is going to daycare at Donna's house on Wednesday mornings. She's loving it there, and it's been a really nice thing in my life to have some separation during the week! Sylvie just loves groups, and she blooms when we're in class. She loved Music Together, and I'm considering signing her up for another session this fall.

What fun these little kids are!

### **10-year college reunion (2009-06-21 21:31)**

We're back home again after a fun trip to Northfield for my 10-year Carleton College reunion. We stayed in Evans dorm, which was an experience in itself. The kids did pretty well. The weather was warm -> hot and quite humid.

I think Andrew's favorite part of the weekend was rolling down the hill to Bell Field. Over and over and over and over.

On the way home, we stopped to play at a park in LaCrosse, and both kids had a great time splashing in the Mississippi River. Andrew sat down in it, and Sylvia was laughing hysterically as the boats zoomed past and made big splashing waves.

When we got home, the kids were wonderfully excited to play with their toys and their books. It's like they had to make up for lost time. Hard to believe that it's been 10 years since I graduated from Carleton. I do love Northfield. It was such a lovely place to live.

### **June 19 (2009-06-21 21:36)**

Last Friday, Bryan and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary. That seems like a big number to me. Mature adults...one might even say old adults...have been married for 10 years. Old people with like two kids. And a mortgage. hmmm

Since we were driving to Carleton and staying in a dorm with our kids on our anniversary, we're celebrating next week. Bryan's mom flies into town on Monday night, and on Tuesday evening, she's taking the kids so we can get away. Now I have to decide where we should eat out that night. Anyone have recommendations?

I love being married to Bryan. It's one of the things in my life that makes me happy each day. I sure am lucky to get to spend my days with such a great person and wonderful friend. Happy Anniversary, honey!

### **Andrew's 4th birthday! (2009-06-21 22:14)**

Andrew's fourth birthday is on Monday. He's so excited. It took him almost an hour to fall asleep tonight. I'm not even sure exactly what he's excited about. Well, I guess there are a bunch of things.

- He knows I'm making cupcakes (he requested chocolate with yellow and orange frosting and green and blue sprinkles). He is probably anticipating licking the frosting off several of them.
- He's over the moon with excitement about seeing his Granny Lu when she flies in tomorrow evening.
- He knows we're getting together with friends for lunch...following by the afore mentioned cupcakes.
- He is eagerly anticipating getting M &M's. The only time I let him get candy in the checkout lane is on his birthday. All the rest of the year he has to look at the candy and think about what he is going to get when it is his birthday. Ohhh, those are going to be some goooood M &M's!
- I don't think he knows that a person gets presents on their birthday, but that'll be a fun surprise for him!

### Thinking back on Three – A letter to Andrew (2009-06-21 22:18)

I often have bittersweet feelings as you and Sylvia have birthdays. How can Sylvia be 16 months old? How is it that you my sweet boy are only going to be three for fifteen more minutes? (It's almost midnight as I write.)

I loved Three. Andrew, you were such a sweet and generous and imaginative and snugly Three. My dear boy, here are a few things I'll remember from this year. You can read this list sometime when you're older.

- Long games of animals. Hibernating together, hunting together, learning to fly, hatching, turning into butterflies, finding berries. Andrew, you have an amazing imagination, and I've so enjoyed spending long hours exploring the worlds you create.
- Number and letter explosions. The second half of this year, Andrew, you just fell in love with writing. You're so inquisitive and meticulous, and you have an unbelievable attention span. Longer than mine! I loved watching you copy the names of animals or spices or people onto the chalk board. It's fun to watch you grow and eagerly learn. When you learn how to read, you are going to love it!
- Trike-ing, skipping, sledding, and splashing to preschool. Andrew, you so enjoyed going to Monona Grove Nursery School. You felt right at home there, and you adored your teachers (the feeling was mutual). It's a wonderful feeling to see your child in an environment where they can really play and learn and grow all on their own. What a lovely introduction to school. You conduct yourself in ways that really make me feel proud of you.
- Climbing, running, swinging. We spent a lot of time outdoors this past year. I've loved being home with you and Sylvia full-time. When the weather is fair (and sometimes even when it's not), we spend much of the day out-of-doors. Andrew, you have become such a tree-climber in the last year. I really enjoy watching how confident you are in your body-awareness, and I'm impressed with your strength and agility. You're brave. And you're smart too, which makes me trust you. I wonder what physical feats the next year will hold!
- Making your sister laugh. In the last year, you and Sylvia have developed an ever-deepening relationship. I think my favorite sound in the whole wide world is the sound of you and your sister giggling together. Sylvie delights in you, Andrew. For her, you are the center of all that is fun. The way you look out for her and are concerned about her welfare is amazing. Sure, you sometimes knock her over, but more often than that, you bring her something to make her happy. I'm so grateful for the kind and generous person you are, my sweet boy.

I'm sure there are dozens of other points I could put in this list, but my clock now says 12:02. You're Four! And Andrew, the thing I hold dearest is the completeness of the bond you and I share. We're connected, Andrew. You curl up in my lap or climb in bed in the morning. I love the smell of you. I love to nuzzle your curls and hold your little (but not so little) hand in mine. I love the way you reach for me, the way you want to be carried when you're sleepy. When you get hurt, you want me to make it better. You bring me flowers (oh, and worms too) with such joy.

I know you're going to grow up, and I'm so excited to see what you do and to experience four, five, six and on and on. But it does break my heart just a little to see my baby boy leave his babyhood behind. We're leaving sweet



memories in our wake, and I'm glad for that. I just want to bottle the size of you, the smell of you, the innocence and playfulness and sweetness of you.

If I live to be 90, I'll want to pull out that bottle of three-year-old Andrew so I can recapture one of the purest experiences in my life - being your mommy.

OK, now I'll dry my tears and go to bed so tomorrow morning I can celebrate with you. Baby, you're Four!

### Comic reflecting life (2009-06-24 13:44)

This For Better or For Worse comic strip made me laugh. Sylvia hasn't learned "no" yet, but she does a lot of screeching when she is in the mood.



### Anniversary night out! (2009-06-24 14:29)

Bryan's mom is here in town this week, and last night she watched Andrew and Sylvia while Bryan and I went on a date to celebrate our 10th anniversary. It wasn't just a dinner date...it was an all-night-away-from-home date! We dined at Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, and oh, my, gosh, it was good.

Every part of the meal was good. I could go on in detail about the scallops appetizer, my fillet with shrimp that was oh, so magnificent, the pecan crusted sweet potatoes and creamed spinach sides, mmmmm, and berries and cream (which was just like sweetened condensed milk) for dessert. Oh my. So good. Bryan had the ribeye steak and the bread pudding dessert, and he was equally enthusiastic.

After a leisurely, three-hour meal (eating slowly was such a treat!), we headed to the Mansion Hill Inn, which

is where we stayed the night of our wedding 10-years ago. ahh memories.

What a lovely way to celebrate 10 years of marriage! Through dinner, we reminisced about our honeymoon in Switzerland, the last 10 years, our amazing children, and how much our relationship has grown and deepened because of pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing.

We also did some dreaming about what kinds of things we want to do in the next 10 years. We're hoping for some family driving vacations, so stay tuned in upcoming summers for new chapters of The Dotzour take the US. Chapter one, the Badlands.

I recommend (if at all possible) taking an evening away from the kids and the house. It felt good to spend some time with just my sweetheart. It was a good reminder of how much we enjoy spending time together!

### **Lovely times off-line (2009-06-30 11:23)**

Hi Computer! It seems like a week since you and I sat together. Instead, I've been playing with Bryan's family or enjoying some time out of the house while Bryan's mom watched my kids. We celebrated Andrew's birthday last Monday, played for a week with Granny and Melanie, then welcomed Grandad and had Andrew's birthday party at Tenney Park on Saturday. It was all just a lot of fun!



Yesterday was my birthday, and I enjoyed a few delicious meals out (the breakfast sandwiches at Daisy Cafe and Cupcakery are delicious). I got to spend the morning yesterday with my dear sister, Melanie, and then I spent the afternoon shopping solo. SO LO. Loved it.



Sylvie is napping now, and I sorted through pictures from the last week. I barely took any the whole time Bryan's family was here. But there's bunches of pictures from the last week, and in a moment, I'll upload the dozens of pictures from Andrew's birthday party. enjoy!



## 5.7 July

### Just us (2009-07-05 21:06)

After spending a lovely five days together, Grace and Tim and John all headed home today. So now we don't have friends or family visiting us anymore.

This is how we feel.



### My brain is full of posts to write! (2009-07-09 06:42)

Greetings! It feels like it's been weeks since I've posted this and that about the happenings in the Dotzour household. That means that I have the ideas for about eight posts rambling around in my head. I've got to find time to write them down so I can quiet the reminders in my brain,

Brain: "Have you posted yet about Sylvie's new-found love of books?"

Me: "No, Brain, I haven't. We've had company, and I haven't been on the computer much."

Brain: "Have you put up the pictures or written an update about your great visit with Grace and Tim and John?"

Me: "Brain, please be quiet. I've been editing photos from the photo sessions I did in the last couple weeks, and that is definitely a higher priority."

Brain: "Are you sure? Humph, well, in that case, have you at least written down all the many posts that you want to do eventually so you don't forget?"

Me: "Good idea, Brain. I'll do it!"

I just finished editing some lovely pictures from a photo session last week. Take a look!



I just tried out Gmail's new "tasks" feature to track the posts I want to write. Seems like a handy little application! Stay tuned for more content soon. I now return to my regularly scheduled parenting.



**Dates! (2009-07-09 07:04)**

In the last month, Bryan and I have been going on lots of dates. And it's been lovely! I highly recommend it to all parents out there:) We've hired my friend Karen's daughter, Shara to come over once a week or so, and I'm still marveling at how nice it is to take a few hours off to chat with my husband and to spend some time in each other's quiet company.

The first night we went out - not to do anything in particular but just to be out together - I kept having the thought, "This is amazing! You can PAY someone to feed your child dinner and put them to bed!" We're really lucky to have family in town, and Michael and Lisa are awesome baby sitters. I feel most comfortable asking for their help with longer evenings (like our outing to American Players Theater last week). It's so nice to have options!

So Shara has come over a couple week night and a couple Sunday afternoons. Bryan and I went to Mickey's Tavern on Willy Street. For those of you in Madison, I recommend it! It's run by the same woman who owns Lazy Jane's, and the food was good! They've got a nice outdoor eating area, and the inside is cozy with an eclectic mix of tables, couches, kitschy decorations, and pool tables. A cozy, bright, and clean place. I think we'll be going back!



A few weeks ago we went to Tenney Park and ate Shrimp 'po boys on the pier while the sun set. I love the idea of spending regular downtime with my sweetie.



**Grandma Margot (2009-07-09 14:24)**

We talk about my mom quite a bit in our home. Andrew brings her up now and then; I talk about her when we make meals she loved, or read books she used to read me when I was little, or when we see things I think would make her smile. It feels good to me to know that Andrew and Sylvia can grow up knowing her and loving her even though she isn't here.



Now and then, it feels particularly sad to me that she never got to meet Sylvia, and I think how much she would have delighted in the little boy whom Andrew has become. I am so very glad that she got see so much of the little guy during his first two years. She adored being his grandma.

When we were at the library last week, I picked up a book that I would buy for Mom if she were here today. Since I can't give it to her, I'll share it with you. It's called *In Grandma's Arms*, and it is written by Jayne Shelton. Here's an some excerpts:

x

In Grandma's arms, in our Storybook Chair, we can do anything - we can go anywhere.

...

She shares all my dreams, wraps them up in a prayer - then she opens a book, and we're suddenly there...

On a carpet of magic just made for a ride - with the wind in our faces, we swoop, loop, and glide.

...

Alas...I grow drowsy in our Storybook Chair. As I slip into sleep, I know Grandma is there... with a kiss for my cheek and a wish on a star - in my grandma's warm arms, love is not very far. I can hear her sweet voice sing a soft lullaby - as I rock in her arms I can dream... I can fly.

I read this book to Andrew and Sylvia and told them how much Grandma Margot loved to read to kids.

I have a memory of her buying me some clothes maybe ten years ago, and she said, "Alright, I'll get this for you. But you have to read lots of books to my grandbabies." Check that one, Mom. Love you.

### **Sylvia at 17 months (2009-07-11 12:02)**

My little girl's 17-month birthday is today! This morning, Andrew and Bryan went fishing at the lake (trying out their new Father's Day fishing poles), and Sylvie and I played in the yard. She is getting good at kicking a ball. She runs up to it, gives it a kick while on the move, and keeps running after it. Run, run run! That little girl looks so cute as she dashes about after her brother!



Sylvia on the Fourth of July. No idea what she was thinking!

A few weeks ago, Sylvia had a major change of heart about books. She now loves them. As Shell Silverstein says,

Loved these things will all her soul, loved them more than shining diamonds, loved them more than glistenin' gold.

When she wakes in the morning, she no longer says "oooshhh" (shoes) while pointing to her shelf of shoes. Now she stumbles to stand, points at the books shelf, and while still bleary-eyed says, "ook" (books). Many, many times a day, she picks up a book, comes to an adult, turns her self around, plops her little bottom into your lap, and hands you the book. It's so adorable!! I know many babies (including my first baby) enjoy books from an early age, but for Sylvia this is a 180 in her attitude toward books. From a very early age, she was not only not interested in books, she downright objected to their presence in her life. About seven months ago, she turned a corner where she started to like books...but only one page per book. So this whole new love of books is a most exciting change:)



Moments later, she crashed!

In other news, she's gaining coordination by leaps and bounds. She's walking down stairs sometimes. When we were at the capitol building last week, she was having lots of fun walking down some shallow steps all by herself. She uses

a spoon really well (when she feels like it), and she's quite interested in using non-sippy cups (just like her brother).



We see lots of this silly face

She's imitating lots of sounds, and while she doesn't have loads of clear words, she can make her point known using verbal signals. Sylvia went to Donna's house for daycare on Wednesday, and she waved goodbye to me. She said, "Ahna" (Donna), and it sounds like she had a great time.

Sylvia and Andrew are going to be in Texas without me and Bryan for nine days later this month. I bet she'll seem so grown up when she comes back home!



The girl likes to "help" me cook!

### **Our June and July visits (2009-07-12 12:20)**

We had such fun with our friends and family who visited us these past weeks! Bryan's mom was here from June 22-30, Melanie was here from June 24-29, and Mark was here from June 26-29. I took almost no photos during their entire visit, which I am sure I will regret when I want to make the 2010 Dotzour Family Calendar, but oh well!

Andrew and Melanie are best buddies, and Andrew and Sylvia in general were both so happy to have their adored Granny, Grandad, and Aunt Mel staying with us. I got to go out to breakfast with Melanie on my birthday, I took LuAnn and Melanie out to American Players Theater for a lovely evening seeing *The Philanderer*, and in general we all enjoyed being together. I so wish we lived close enough to hang out more often!

### **Can money buy happiness? (2009-07-13 12:55)**

You know, generally, I would say "no way," but this week I just might disagree with that general assessment.

I used my birthday "crazy money" to buy myself some new clothes from my favorite catalog: Title Nine. I haven't gotten myself several new, full-price items in a loong time (actually, Bryan's mom got me some great winter



clothes last fall, so that's not entirely true, but anyway...). So for the last few days, I've been rejoicing in wearing new shirts, a new skirt, a new dress, new pants...ahhh.

Also, and this is probably too much information for any male readers out there, but I got myself some new bras on my birthday. They are my first new ones since I bought nursing bras when I was pregnant with Andrew in 2004. They make me so happy! For all you mamas out there who haven't gotten yourself new undergarments, I highly recommend it. Get professionally fitted. It makes a girl feel good.

Eventually I may not be dancing around in happiness every morning over my new clothes, but for the last week, my spirit feels light because I feel pretty. What a perfect kind of birthday present!

### **Our visit with Grace, Tim, and John (2009-07-13 21:12)**

Most of the blogs I read took a couple days to post about their 4th of July activities. I'm finding myself a little bashful that it's taken me almost 10 days to link to the photos about our great time with our friends Grace, Tim, and John from DC.



You'll have to check out the fun and silly photos I posted on our website.

Andrew and John are great buds and had a wonderful time playing together. We spent five days hanging around our home and town. Tim took the boys for a bike ride, we went to the farmer's market, we explored the arboretum, we played in the sprinkler and in the slip 'n slide, we had picnics and lit sparklers... The boys slept in Andrew's room together and did a lovely job of being sweet, cute little four-year-olds. Sylvie was delighted to have additional friends in our home. Grace and Tim fit right in, and the days sped by.

Here are some of my favorite images from our week:











Thanks for coming to visit us, guys! We had such fun:)

### **Heaven (2009-07-13 21:26)**

Some say heaven is a place. A place where, perhaps my mom and grandparents might reside. I say it is this:

x

Buttermilk cream

When Bryan and I were on our honeymoon in Switzerland 10 (!! ) years ago, we stayed at a hotel in Bern that had an amazing restaurant. We still remember the extravagance of the cheese chart and the fabulousness of the food in general. But the thing that makes our tastebuds shiver in happy nostalgia was a strawberry cream dessert. It was light like a mirangue. It had lots of cream in it, there were these amazing strawberries...and we dubbed it heaven. It was the hotel's signature dessert. Oh, how I've missed it these long years.

However, Everyday Food, my go-to magazine for most of our dinners, had this intriguing recipe in the May issue. So I tried it out. And it was good. Gooooood. So I made it again. Again, it was goood.

Here's a link to the recipe. I hope you find a reason to try it. If you don't have ramekins, don't fret. I'd suggest making it in a bowl. The presentation won't be as fancy, but it may not matter when you end up tucking into the

bowl with a serving spoon! Ahh, fantasies. Everyone needs them.



Sylvia tries out the whipping cream and declares it successfully whipped

### Buttermilk Creams with Strawberries

..... Prep:

20 minutes

Total:

20 minutes + chilling



Whipped cream gives these no-bake eggless custards a delicate texture. Don't worry if the mixture forms clumps at first – it will come together with gentle folding.

---

## Ingredients

Serves 8.

- 1 1/4 teaspoons unflavored gelatin (from a 1/4-ounce envelope)
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup low-fat buttermilk
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1 pound strawberries, hulled and quartered
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

## Directions

1. In a small saucepan, sprinkle gelatin over 3 tablespoons cold water. Let stand until softened, about 5 minutes. Heat over low, stirring, until gelatin has dissolved, about 30 seconds.
2. In a large bowl, whisk 1/4 cup sugar with buttermilk until dissolved. Whisking constantly, add gelatin mixture in a very thin stream. In another large bowl, beat cream and 1/4 cup sugar until soft peaks form.
3. With a rubber spatula, gently stir half of whipped cream into buttermilk mixture; fold in remaining whipped cream. Divide among eight 6-ounce ramekins. Refrigerate until set, at least 6 hours (or up to 1 day, covered with plastic wrap).

4. When ready to serve, toss strawberries with 1/4 cup sugar, lemon juice, and 1 tablespoon water. Let stand until juicy, about 5 minutes. Run a paring knife around edge of each ramekin and dip each briefly in steaming hot water; invert buttermilk creams onto serving plates and top with strawberries.

#### **Needed: Book recommendations (2009-07-14 09:04)**

Have I mentioned that the kids and I are leaving for Texas tomorrow? We are. I'll be hanging out with them and with Bryan's parents until Sunday, and then I fly home to Madison for a couple days before Bryan and I fly to (drum roll please) Sweden!

I can't imagine what it is going to be like to be child-free for eleven days. Eleven. Eleven. Wow. That's a long time. <sup>x</sup> And while I have a twinge of nausea at the thought of being apart my my dear ones for that long, I mostly feel like dancing around. Weeeeeee! What will we do with all our free time?

Bryan's friend Kaleb gets married in western Sweden on July 22 (see a post here for background). We'll be in Sweden for eight days. Ahh, eight days in Europe. I really can't believe it.

So here's what I need from you. Dear readers of my blog, please help me by sending me recommendations for books that I should read while on my trip. I'd like to read some good books.

With all my photo business activities, I've done almost no pleasure reading this summer. Jessica just gave me *A Homemade Life* by Molly Wizenberg. And I'm loving it! My favorite book in '08 was *A Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver.

We'll have two international flights and lots of mornings and evenings to read. Ahhh reading. How I love you. How I miss you!

I'm looking forward to hearing what you all recommend!

#### **Some of my favorite songs (2009-07-14 12:36)**

My aunt Julie (my dad's sister), her husband Kevin, and their little boy came to Wisconsin earlier this month for a long visit. I was happy to spend a couple days with them, and it was so much fun to meet their little man. He's only a few months older than Sylvie, and he's just completely adorable. On Friday night, I took them to Tenney Park for a photo session. It brings a smile to my face to think about how lovely they look together as a family.

I made a mix CD for them with some of my favorite kids music. Then I uploaded the mix to iTunes so I can share it here with you. The original mix had 20 songs, but apparently some of them weren't iTunes approved. Enjoy my iMix!

[EMBED]

Track  
Name  
Artist  
Album  
Genre

1  
Bottle Of Sunshine  
Milk Shake  
Bottle Of Sunshine  
Children's Music

2  
So Glad I'm Here  
Elizabeth Mitchell  
You Are My Sunshine  
Children's Music - Folk

3  
The Littlest Birds  
The Be Good Tanyas  
Putumayo - Animal Playground  
Children's Music - World

4  
You Are My Sunshine  
Elizabeth Mitchell  
You Are My Sunshine  
Children's Music - Folk

5

Happy Lemons  
Ralph Covert  
Happy Lemons  
Children's Music

6

Sometimes  
Frances England  
Fascinating Creatures  
Children's Music - Folk

7

Jump Up  
Dan Zanes & Friends  
Family Dance  
Children's Music

8

Battu  
Angélique Kidjo  
Putumayo - African Playground  
Children's Music - World

9

Bling-Blang  
Arlo Guthrie  
Sing Along With Putumayo  
Children's Music

10

Bananaphone  
Rhonda Vincent  
Sing Along With Putumayo  
Children's Music

11

I Have A Rooster  
David Landau  
Music For Kids  
Children's Music

12

Our Imaginary Rhino  
Justin Roberts  
Meltdown!  
Children's Music

13

Aikendrum  
The Nields  
All Together Singing In The Kitchen  
Children's Music - Folk

14

Shortnin' Bread  
Laurie Berkner  
Under A Shady Tree  
Children's Music

15

Grandfather's Clock  
Johnny Cash  
The Johnny Cash Children's Album  
Children's Music

16

Nothin' Blues  
Music Together  
Music Together: Triangle  
Children's Music

17

Snuggle Puppy

Eric Stoltz  
Philadelphia Chickens  
Children's Music

18  
Down In The Valley  
Elizabeth Mitchell  
You Are My Little Bird  
Children's Music - Folk

19  
Miracle  
Renee & Jeremy  
It's a big world  
Children's Music - Folk

20  
Lullaby  
Dixie Chicks  
Taking The Long Way  
Children's Music - Lullaby

21  
The Water Is Wide  
Music Together  
Music Together: Triangle  
Children's Music

22  
Night Mantra  
Renee & Jeremy  
It's a big world  
Children's Music - Folk

23  
Bye-Bye Sweetie-Pie  
David Landau  
Kids and Kitties



**LOST (2009-07-15 08:27)**

Not my cats. Bowser and Spooky are here and happy, curled up in the sunshine. No, what's lost is Andrew's things.



Although Bryan might disagree, I take a certain measure of pride in keeping tabs on my kids stuff. If I feel like it's important, I don't tend to misplace it...at least not for long. But in the last month, Andrew lost both his summer shoes and his orange jacket. Gone. At parks. sniff.

I visited three different lost and founds, but his items were not to be found. Ahh, \$45 summer shoes. How I shake my head at your departure. And I'd gotten that jacket big, and Andrew still could have worn it this fall and probably next spring. Gone, gone, gone.

I also lost Sylvia's sunflower bib, but fortunately a friend picked it up after I left the restaurant. And I lost one of Sylvia's metal spoons at our favorite Indian restaurant (The Taste of India on the capitol square), and that hasn't re-appeared.

I've decided to move on, and I bought Andrew new summer shoes. We have also named those "lickety splits" like his old ones. To help cover the cost, I got him nice, used fall shoes on Ebay for cheap so we won't have another

big shoe purchase this fall. And I'm going to get him a new orange fleece jacket. He's had several. I think of orange fleece jackets as one of Andrew's signature pieces. This was his third one. Here are two earlier examples:



Time for a new one in this picture!



And here's my plan for #4. Unless anyone out there picked up a size 4 orange fleece jacket at Vilas park last month...

**July happenings...sweet summer! (2009-07-16 08:30)**

Our summer has been so much fun. When I sit down to recap the last few week, I just lean my head back, sigh softly, and smile. Being a full time mom, the weather has a major impact on our days. I've been soaking in the warm weather, the hours spent hanging out in the yard, and the ease and fun that playing in the yard brings.



Here are some thoughts about our last weeks:

- Andrew got a tricycle a few weeks ago (a \$4 garage sale find!). He LOVES it. He named it Oriole (because it sings (squeaks) like a bird). I think I jumped the gun by getting him a bike with training wheels. He wasn't interested in riding it ("I'll ride it tomorrow," he would say). When he did ride it, he was very nervous and didn't want to go far. And that defeated the whole idea of having a bike to play on in the summer. With his tricycle, he's been zipping up and down the driveway every day, and he is much happier and more comfortable. Now I need to get Sylvia a trike because she really wants to ride Andrew's, and it's just too big for a little girl!
- The lightening bugs have come out. I love lightening bugs. Magic in my yard. I have four clematis vines growing on our front porch. The summer blooming ones are doing alright, and the fall blooming one is magnificent. I look forward to seeing its blooms in a couple months!
- We've enjoyed lots of picnics this summer. We've met friends at parks and beaches, picnicked in our own back yard, and in general gotten lots of use of my beloved picnic basket. It was a lot of fun to see Sarah and baby Charlie at the beach last week! Can you believe he is going to be one next month? Wow.



- Andrew's obsession with Godzilla has lessened slightly. He had five monster DVDs that he was completely obsessed with, and those have gone on vacation. He doesn't seem to mind that they're gone. I don't think I have conveyed the depth to which Andrew's consciousness was focused on all things Godzilla. There were a few weeks there where I don't think two minutes went by without some Godzilla (or Mothra, Rodan, King Gidora, Mechagodzilla, Manilla, Titanasarus, Angus, etc.) reference. Now that it's toned down, I feel relief. I think our family tends toward the obsessive, so Andrew comes by it naturally. We're reading more books and playing more games these days. I think it's a better fit. One thing that has been fun is that Andrew got figurines of Godzilla and three other monsters for his birthday. He loves playing with them and actually plays with them independently for good chunks of time. The monsters play with the other animals he has, and they all seem to get along well. For monsters that is.
- Our vegetable garden is growing well, and we've enjoyed lots of home-grown salads. Our spinach, lettuce, raddish, and peas have been yummy. Sylvia runs to the garden shouting "EEEESSSS!!" The tomatoes are just starting, so I'll look forward to tasting their yummy goodness in August!



All-in-all, we've had a lovely last month. It's been a very cool summer (with a major exception the week of Andrew's birthday when it was in the 90s all week!). I wish I could bottle these summer days. I think I'm trying to do that by making jam. We're up to three kinds (strawberry, blueberry, and now apricot). Sweet summer.

#### **Up (2009-07-17 09:08)**

On one of our dates, Bryan and I went to see the movie Up.

**x**

I'm so very glad Andrew wasn't with us. I can firmly state that this movie is not for little kids. At least not my little kids. Maybe eight-years-old would be a good age to start. So, not a little kids movie. But for adults, I thought it was great.

Bryan and I don't go to movies in the theater, so this was a big departure for us. We've been dedicated Netflix fans for the last four years. But the whole experience was just lovely. We got a big tub of popcorn, snagged a two-person seat at the theater for increased snuggling comfort, and laughed and laughed. I cried several times too. It was such a touching movie!

The talking dogs cracked me up. I think one could say that I was convulsing with laughter. I hadn't heard anything about the movie ahead of time, so it may have helped that I went in with no expectations. What a lovely time. I smile every time I think about that show.



Have you seen it? What did you think?

### **Summer book recommendations (2009-07-18 12:55)**

Thanks everyone for sharing via Facebook comments and the comments here on my website so many great recommendations for good summer reads. I've compiled your suggestions, and I'll be set with lots of good books for my trip to Sweden next week.

Without further ado, here they are!

Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen  
Love the One You're With by Emily Giffin  
The Time Traveler's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger  
Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez  
Trail of Crumbs: Hunger, Love, and the Search for Home by Kim Sunee  
The Middle Place by Kelly Corrigan  
Sweetness in the Belly by Camilla Gibb  
A Homemade Life by Molly Wizenberg  
Same Kind of Different As Me by Ron Hall and Denver Moore  
Marley and Me by John Grogan  
Out Stealing Horses by Per Petterson  
I Love You, Beth Cooper by Larry Doyle  
The History of Love by Nicole Krauss  
Life of Pi by Yann Martel  
Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon  
Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse by Lousie Erdrich  
Eat, Pray, Love by Elizabeth Gilbert  
Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver

Greetings from sunny Texas! It's hot (100 degrees), so we're enjoying some indoor play:) The kids are having a blast playing with their Granny and Grandad.

### **Stillness (2009-07-21 05:30)**

I woke up this morning in my own bed to hear the songs of birds coming through my window. I nuzzled down into my pillow for a few moments, pet Spooky (who seemed just delighted to find me at home, awake, and interested in loving him), looked over at my snoozing husband, and then I decided to roll over and go back to sleep. For some, this may be a normal weekend experience. For me, not so much. The kiddos wake up early. Bryan and I tend to take turns getting up with them so the other can sleep in a bit, but by 7:15am, it's usually pretty noisy and active in our little home.



So waking up on a still, beautiful morning felt like luxury.

I know that there are people out there who don't have kids and who wish they had kids more than anything, so I feel kind of ungrateful to be singing, "MY KIDS ARE AWAY FROM ME.....Yeeehooooo!!!!" But that's how I feel. So I'll sing my song.

Andrew and Sylvie are happily ensconced in Texas at Granny and Grandad's house. The report is that they are doing wonderfully. Leaving wasn't too hard (hey, I got to do it twice since my first flight was canceled). The whole flight home I felt like I was floating along in first class since I could just stick my nose in a book for seven hours instead of tend to the needs and wants of my babes.

Now that I think of it, that seems to be a big part of having kids...tending to the needs and wants of others first. Always. And now on day two of eleven with no kids, I'm reveling in the thoughts of, "Hmmm, what do I want to do today?"

I think it's going to be a great week:)

### **Pictures from Texas (2009-07-21 17:31)**

I had a great time in Texas. A really lovely time. Bryan's parents are just such nice, wonderful people. I won the lottery when I met Bryan:)

I got a phone call from Andrew and Sylvie today (Sylvia even said "Hah Mama" and "Bye" pronounced "baaa"). Andrew is signed up for a swimming class this week. Sounds like it went well!



I used some of my precious time today to download pictures and put them on Flickr. You'll see an album of pictures from the last couple weeks and an album of my time in Texas.



I just purchased (with my first checks from my photography business!) a new 50mm lens for my camera. I'm loving it. LOVING it. I just feel so happy when I'm taking pictures!



The kids are having a great time playing with all the toys at Granny and Grandad's. We mostly stayed indoors due to the heat. It got down to the low 90s at night.



Wow. Look at that shallow depth of field!









Ahh, those kids. They crack me up! There are lots more in the photo gallery.

### **We're in Stockholm! (2009-07-23 07:39)**

I'm writing to you from our bright hotel room in downtown Stockholm. We've been in the country for about seven hours, and we've explored some really cool parts of the city. Bryan just lay down on the bed, and he immediately lapsed into sleep. Poor guy hasn't slept in the last 27 hours:) Photos are up in my gallery!



There's our plane, ready to take us to Sweden

Our flight from Madison to Chicago and from Chicago to Stockholm went really smoothly. I got about half-way through *The Time Traveler's Wife*, and I enjoyed getting wine and a couple meals served to us on the plane. Somehow mushy peas and bread-in-a-bag taste cool when they're served at 35,000 feet.



Kaleb met us at the airport. We haven't seen him since our wedding 10 years ago!

Oh dear, my laptop battery is about to give out, and it is looking like the power adapter/converter that I brought along isn't working. I'll post this now and hopefully be able to re-charge my computer soon so I can upload all the pictures I took today!



We're here! Stockholm is made up of lots of islands, so there's lots of bridges too.

\*Well, I discovered to my chagrin that the power adapter that I bought wasn't intended for laptop use. I think I fried it. So I called the front desk, and they sent me down the street to an electronics store where I picked up a more powerful transformer. It cost 240 kroner. I think the exchange rate is eight kroner to a dollar, but I'm so terrible at doing division on the fly that I tend to be totally in the dark about how much things cost when we're traveling abroad. When Bryan and I were in Italy for our honeymoon, I remember being completely unable to do the math because the conversion was in the 1,000s. It's a little freeing, really, to have no idea what you are paying for item! So anyway, now I have a laptop that can get charged, so all is good. Pictures are currently uploading to Flickr.



We stopped at a cafe for breakfast upon arrival. Kaleb and I had hot chocolate. The quiche was yummy.

I didn't do a lot of planning before our trip. At Terry's knee, I learned that when you go to a new place, you have a wonderful but limited opportunity to delve into that place. To learn, to appreciate, to suck the marrow out of life. The idea of going to a neat city ignorant of the history, sites, and museums was ludicrous. Terry's method of travel involves extensive book buying, book reading, map creation, walking-route developing (with map highlighting), reservation-making, and itinerary-generating.





My favorite image of the day. The buildings are really beautiful!

I like that way of exploring new places, but I'm also rather fond of the current Bryan-and-Althea approach. We got books and movies from the library. I learned about some neat places. Then I forgot about them. Then the trip was suddenly happening and we made last-minute hotel reservations, threw a guide book in our bag, and didn't open it again. Today we wandered around the old section of town. We stumbled upon castles and huge churches, and neither of us knew anything about them. But we enjoyed looking at them. I'm no good at remembering the names of buildings anyways. Things beginning with capital letters seem to slip easily out of my mind. So frankly, we wandered blindly. And we were rather sleep deprived, having gotten on the plane at 4pm in Chicago and gotten off at 8am in Stockholm. It was a fun day!



After consulting my guidebook, I've confirmed that this is Storkyrkan, a 700-year-old cathedral.

Kaleb picked us up at the airport, and we all took the 20-minute train into Stockholm. (This country appears to have a lot of trees. There are also fields and fields of a mysterious crop with yellow flowers.) After dropping our bags off at the Scandic Continental, we set off to explore and find some breakfast.



You can see our hotel in the center left. We're in the fourth floor looking at the red tower to the right.

After a yummy breakfast, Kaleb headed back to the airport to pick up his brother. Bryan and I spent the afternoon exploring the island of Gamla Stan (Old Town). We walked nearly every street, and then we found a nice place to sit down and look out across the river at the boats and beautiful buildings.



We be sleepy

From our bench, we noticed one very large, very tall building (I've since learned, it's called Stadshuset (City Hall)). We could just make out people walking around top of the tower. We decided to see if we could get up there, so we walked around and stood in line for a very long time in a very stiff breeze. The wait was worth it! The view from up top was amazing, and it gave us such a neat perspective on this lovely city.



Looking back at Gamla Stan...the island we walked around all day.

I think that about sums up our adventures for the day. Bryan and I keep pinching ourselves because we can't believe that our trip is happening! We're having such fun! Now we're off to dinner with Kaleb's family. We're looking forward to meeting his wife and baby!

Until tomorrow (??),

Althea

### **Off to Arvika (2009-07-23 22:18)**

We managed to stay awake nearly all day yesterday, so when we got back to the hotel after a lovely dinner with Kaleb's family we crashed hard. I woke up a few times in the night, stunned to find that it was only 12:30 or only 2am, but I fell back to sleep and the alarm woke us at 6:30am. We're packed, and Bryan is looking at me waiting for me to finish so we can go to downstairs and have breakfast and coffee before catching a train to Arvika on the far western side of Sweden. That's where the wedding will be held.

I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of Swedish countryside!

Here's a map. Catch you soon, if there's internet access there. Otherwise, you'll hear from me when I'm back in Stockholm on Monday.

IFRAME: [http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d &source=embed &saddr=stockholm,+sweden &daddr= %C3 %85rboten+sweden &hl=en &geocode= &mra=ls &sll=59.800807,12.600932 &sspn=0.01075,0.041199 &g= %C3 %85rboten+sweden &ie=UTF8 &t=h &ll=59.489726,15.358887 &spn=2.677744,7.03125 &z=7 &output=embed](http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d&source=embed&saddr=stockholm,+sweden&daddr=%C3%85rboten+sweden&hl=en&geocode=&mra=ls&sll=59.800807,12.600932&sspn=0.01075,0.041199&g=%C3%85rboten+sweden&ie=UTF8&t=h&ll=59.489726,15.358887&spn=2.677744,7.03125&z=7&output=embed)

[View Larger Map](#)

### **I love Swedish weddings! (2009-07-24 15:19)**

OK, I love all weddings, but I'm particularly enjoying helping with Karin and Kaleb's wedding. Love, love, love. We're in Arvika for the evening, and tomorrow is the big wedding day.

Right now it is midnight, and I've just finished editing all the pictures for the day. I'm going to upload them to Flickr, and assuming there is time in the morning, I'll plan on writing a post, so stay tuned.



Karin's sister and friends picked these as we walked home from the reception. They were used in the church pew decorations the next day.

#### **Day of anticipation - July 24 (2009-07-25 01:24)**

Yesterday was such a lovely day. A lovely, looong day. Hard to believe that this is only our third day in Sweden. Feels like a week! It helps that the sun doesn't set until about 10pm. When we were driving back to town last night at 9:15pm, the sun was just dipping in the sky. Summer means light here in Sweden:)





The breakfasts we've had here have all featured tomato, cucumber, cheese, and meat sandwiches.

Last night, I uploaded about 100 pictures of the day (it was hard to edit it down, and I figured I'd include lots for Kaleb's friends and family who can't be here). Unfortunately, the internet connection here is slow enough that I'm not able to include pictures in the post, so you'll have to click here to see my Day 2 gallery. (July 27 update...I'm posting pictures now that I'm back in Stockholm!)



Oh, little Arvid! You're so very cute!

Yesterday morning started with an amazing breakfast at the Scandic Continental hotel in Stockholm. I'm not sure if a breakfast counts as a smorgasbord, but that's what I would call it. There were grains and meats and breads and pate and caviar in tubes (photos provided). I was impressed that right below the corn flakes and bran flakes were big dispensers for flax seeds and pumpkin seeds. I loved the creamy apricot yogurt poured from a pitcher, and the coffee was thick and dark. Just the thing to jump-start our sleepy brains.



Some of the midwestern-like scenery we passed while on the train.

I'm glad we were able to stay awake all day yesterday. Made it so we slept well through the night, and we didn't feel much jet-lag effects on Day 2.



The picture's a bit crooked (sorry!). The Arvika train station. Taken from the center of the main square.

After breakfast, we checked out of our hotel and headed across the street to meet Kaleb and his family at the train station. We all had seats in the same car (which seemed a lot like most train cars I've traveled in). Bryan and I got seats facing Kaleb and Karin, and you'll find an excessive set of photos of their little three-month-old baby Arvid in the gallery.



Bryan and his adopted nephew.

The landscape heading west across Sweden from Stockholm is flat, lush, well-treed, and covered with farm fields and lakes. It really reminded me of Minnesota. A lot. I'm not surprised that Swedes settled in Minnesota and Wisconsin. As we got farther west, the landscape became hillier. The hill-tops were covered with pine trees, the lakes became more numerous, and the farm fields gave way to forests. It reminds me a lot of Wisconsin's Up North here in Varmland...the lake district here in western Sweden.



Groom - Best man

Our train took us to the town of Arvika, where we all trundled out of the train in one large, clearly touristy mass. Arvika is a small, lovely town with two main shopping thoroughfares. Karin paid for the wedding cake, and she picked out flowers for the reception tables, and we all enjoyed a lunch outside the train station. Bryan and I were unsuccessful in obtaining a rental car (probably one of those things that would have been good to reserve ahead of time!), so we explored the town for a while, and Kaleb drove us the 20 minutes to the town of Gunnerskog where the wedding will take place.





Rehearsing the wedding ceremony with friend-Magnus as the pastor

Town is probably too strong a word for Gunnerskog. It's probably more like a hamlet or a hollow or a section of country unified by a church and community center. It's beautiful. The barns and houses in this part of the country are often red with lovely architecture. The countryside rolls, and there are lakes around every turn. Birches, oaks, and linden trees cover the countryside. On the drive out, Bryan spotted cranes. Cranes! I believe they were Eurasian Cranes, and it was one of the highlights of the trip for me to see that pair in a farm field, pecking away just like Sandhills do in the states.



Practice recessional - Johanna (Karin's sister is the maid of honor)

The reception is going to be held at an outdoor historical site. The dinner will take place in a lovely open-beamed barn-type building, and the dancing will be held outdoors within a great, enclosed trellised area. I was delighted to be asked to design the flower arrangements for the tables. I also helped Karin, her friend Anna, and her mom decide upon the table decorations. I just love doing all that kinds of thing! Karin and Kaleb were wonderfully calm and connected and peaceful during that busy day. I was so glad that Bryan and I could be here to help and to spend time with them. Bryan, Kaleb, and baby Arvid spent lots of time walking around together and enjoying each other's company. Many thanks to Granny and Grandad for having our kids this week. There's no way we could have been as helpful if Andrew and Sylvia were here!





Their wedding was so\*\* beautiful! I loved the programs and the elegant decorations

I'll be taking photos during the wedding ceremony, and Bryan's the best-man, so mid-afternoon, a group of us headed over to the church (a 10-minute walk past a picturesque lake) for the rehearsal.



Groom emerges from the church looking like a movie star

The rest of the evening was finishing the reception and hanging out. Kaleb's family spent the afternoon traveling over to Norway...apparently it's not too far from here.

Now we're packed and ready for Kaleb to pick us up for the big wedding day! Catcha later!

Althea



Bryan and Kaleb approaching the building (on the left) where the reception was held.

**Wedding day!! (2009-07-26 12:23)**

I'm writing this on the morning of Sunday, July 26 because when we got back to the hotel at 2:30am last night I was a little too tired to post. Yesterday was a wonderful, long, incredible day. I took nearly 3,000 photos. When I crawled into bed and closed my eyes, I could see a string of fuzzy images floating before me, and I could hear my camera lens trying to focus on each one. Maybe I'll take a little break from the picture taking today.



The lovely bride and groom near the lake by the church

(July 27 update: pictures of Kaleb and Karin getting ready before the wedding are now available!)

I woke up and found myself thinking in slightly broken English, like searching for the right word and thinking, "It is like... How do you say?..." Everyone we've met has been so gracious and generous about translating everything into English for us. Throughout the wedding, toasts and announcements were given in either just English or in both languages. Including Kaleb, who seems to be fluent in Swedish, there were only six Americans at the wedding. People here seem so nice and generous and accommodating. Like "Minnesota nice" squared.



They're so happy together!

We started our Saturday morning at a breakfast in our little Hotel Arkaden in Arvika. Yogurt, sliced meats, coffee, sausages, good bread with butter. Kaleb (Groom) picked us up to take us the 20 minute drive out to the wedding location. When we met him, we learned that his mom, Jane, had taken ill the night before, and she was at the hospital in Arvika. Sounded like she started feeling bad in the middle of the night, so Bob (Kaleb's dad), Kyle (Kaleb's brother), and Jessica (Kyle's wife), had taken her into the hospital. While that added a little unanticipated wedding-day worry, Jane ended up being able to make it to the ceremony. And Kaleb and Karin proved that they're unflappable.



(Bride) Karin's friend (Photographer) Karin (confusing, I know!) came over to style (Bride) Karin's hair, and I got to hang out and snuggle baby Arvid. I took pictures, and then Arvid and I walked around the little red-wood-sided house and looked for wild strawberries to pick for the bride on her wedding day. They were growing along the hedges and near the bases of trees, and when you popped a tiny one (smaller than my pinky fingernail) in your mouth, it tasted like a super-charged explosion of ultra-sweet strawberry flavor.



Karin's friend braided ribbons into her hair, and it looked just lovely!



Bryan kept the groom company, and at one point in the morning, I got to take the car back into town to retrieve the wedding flowers that had been missed amidst the chaotic activities of an earlier trip. It was fun to drive a stick-shift again and to be off on my own on lake-laced country roads in rural Sweden.



After returning to the cute house bearing some beautiful rose and peony bouquets and pink and white rose corsages, the whole wedding party got dressed and zipped over to the church for some wedding party pictures before the big show. Bryan was the best man, and Karin's little sister, Johanna, was the maid of honor. (Photographer) Karin and I took pictures of the wedding party as dark clouds rolled past and rain occasionally fell. I was hoping all day that the rain would make way for some blue skies and sunshine, but overall the day was rather dramatically cloudy and not just a little soggy.



I had a lot of fun being a wedding photographer, and (Photographer) Karin and I got along splendidly. I can't wait to see how the images turned out!

The wedding started at 4pm. The church was surprisingly ornate and big for being in what appears to be a lightly populated area. Apparently there was a government-connected church until about nine years ago, so the church used to be a Swedish church.

I was the primary photographer during the ceremony, and I had a lot of fun (though I was a bit nervous) taking pictures up front and then back in the balcony. It was a beautiful ceremony, done in a combination of English and Swedish, and presided over by a family friend and the local parson. I saw a lot of tears in guest's eyes, and (once things got started) the bridal couple radiated gladness.

The reception was held at a place the locals call a museum. A 10-minute walk from the church, it consists of a collection of maybe eight houses and converted barns or out-buildings. I hear that festivals and historic demonstrations are held in these places. I loved the grass-roofed building, the mossy stone walls, and the beautiful open-beamed structure where the wedding reception was held. The rain stopped by throughout the evening, but guests wandered around the open area between the building, took pictures with a birch-wood heart, and worked on a group painting for the bridal couple.

The reception was presided over by Karin's brother, Magnus, who was a splendid Toast Master. He's 22-years-old, and did a great job making announcements every half hour or so. Then throughout dinner, he organized the

toasts so guests gave them every 15 minutes or so. It's a lovely tradition, and I so enjoyed hearing about Karin and Kaleb from some of those who love them best.

Bryan gave a wonderful toast that was funny and touching. Makes me proud to be his girl!

After dinner and dessert, there was mingling and dancing, and then cake was served around 11pm. Just as the sun was setting. By midnight, you could see light in the sky where the sun was just starting to peek around. When we took a taxi back home to Arvika at 2am, the stars were out, but the sky in the northeast was getting bright. I guess you could say that we danced until dawn!

We crawled into bed by 3am, and slept straight through until 10:15am when we woke up to attend a post-wedding brunch. Sounds like the bridal couple got home and settled by 5am, so I imagine that they're pretty exhausted! Kaleb just drove us back to the little house they are staying, and Bryan is exploring the grounds and enjoying sitting on the front porch, gazing out over the lake and hills. He heard a crane calling, and he saw a cute elderly woman kicking and zipping along on a sort of scooter on this wind-y, bumpy road. This feels like the perfect kind of place to come and soak in peace. The kitchen has a wood-burning stove, there are light pink geraniums in the white-paned windows, and the light filters in through lace curtains on the pine floors.

We're planning to spend the day relaxing with Kaleb and his family, and perhaps we'll do some walking or exploring around the area. I have a few pictures to check out, so I may do some of that too!

I've been missing my kiddos a bit today. Not that I'm sad, but if I had the opportunity, I'd love to spend some hours in their sweet company. And so I'll sign off! Good tidings from the rolling Swedish countryside!

Althea

### **Relaxing in the Swedish countryside (2009-07-26 14:14)**

I'm writing this on Sunday night at (according to our bedside clock) 22:40. We're back at our hotel after a full day spent at the home of Karin's aunt...the site of a historic mill, a field of raspberries, and a baby's first birthday party. Karin's mom grew up in in Arbotten (this area of homes nestled in the hill overlooking the lake), and her sister's family now owns and has renovated the family home (decorated with an old-fashioned Swedish aesthetic).



This morning we woke up at 10:15 after having stayed out until 2am the previous night. We squeezed into the car of four friends we met at the wedding and zipped over to a nearby restaurant where they were holding the post-wedding brunch. The restaurant had wood-burning stoves in the corner of the room and was decorated with lots of lovely old-style Swedish plates and other charming knickknacks. Bryan and I enjoyed a great brunch and got to laugh and enjoy the company of Kaleb and Karin's friends a bit more before they headed back to Stockholm.



Afterwards, Kaleb drove Bryan and me out to the cottage where he and Karin are staying. We relaxed there, and Bryan took in the beautiful countryside. When Karin and Kaleb joined us, we all walked to Karin's aunt's home. On our walk down the lane, we passed moss-covered stone walls, gracefully arching birches, and field housing a little filly and her mama.



Our afternoon at Ingebor's home, flew by, and when they broke out the grill and left-over hot dogs from the wedding, I was shocked to learn that it was dinner time. Between the jet lag, the crazy time the sun sets (it was still quite light at 10pm tonight), and the wedding activities, time seems to work quite differently here in Sweden than

anywhere else I've ever been. During the afternoon, we celebrated Karin's cousin's son's first birthday. Sophia made a delicious strawberry, raspberry, custard tarte for Erik's first birthday, and she's promised to send me the recipe. I also ate way too many macaroons (if that's possible). And there was homemade cherry lemonade. There are some good cooks in this family!



Kaleb's mom has been ill, but she felt better today and attended the gathering at the mill today. Back in the company of her family, she appeared in good spirits. Jane has a real knack for making baby Arvid gurgle and smile. She's got that grandma touch.





Karin's uncle gave us a tour of the family mill that sits next to the house. It was built in the early 1800s and was run by the family from then until the 1960s. In recent years, Karin's cousins and aunt and uncle have been hard at work cleaning, painting, and maintaining it, and it's a really beautiful historic site. I took lots of pictures, and I'll share them as soon as I get a chance to download them from my camera. Maybe tomorrow on the train!



In the early evening (after hot dogs and beers and before gorging on raspberries from the nearby field), Karin, Kaleb, Arvid (asleep in stroller), Kyle, Jessica, Bryan, and I all walked down the hill to the lake. The water felt a bit chilly, so we didn't jump in. We did, however, walk out to the end of the pier and admire the amazing scenery. Then we all dreamed of coming here or somewhere similar on a regular basis. Lakes and stillness and good company do wonderful things for a person's psyche!



I took a peek at my getting-ready-for-the-wedding pictures, and I've posted some of those to Flickr. Photos on this trip are really getting out of hand. It's sure fun, though!

Tomorrow morning (Monday) we catch the train back to Stockholm. We'll be there until we fly out on Wednesday. What a lovely vacation this is!

Love to those at home (especially my two little ones whom I'm starting to miss a bit!),

Althea

x

### Happy kids in Texas (2009-07-27 12:22)

Bryan and I got to Skype with Granny and the kids this morning, and it was so nice to see their sweet little faces again! Sounds like they are really well settled and happy and Granny and Grandad are going strong. Andrew showed us the animals he's been playing with and told us about his swimming lessons and the shows he's been watching, and Sylvia gave us kisses and pointed out her tongue and belly button.



I do miss those sweet kids. But I'm still having a lot of fun, and while I'd love to see them and give them hugs and be in their wonderful company, I'm having a great time here in Sweden, and I'm not yet ready for it to end!

Granny has been sending us pictures of the kiddos, so I've posted those to the gallery to share. Such sweeties!





**We're back in Stockholm...and I've posted some pictures (2009-07-27 12:31)**

Now that we're back in Stockholm, I added pictures into my posts about the pre-wedding day and the morning of the wedding. Next steps are to process the rest of the wedding day pictures and the pictures from the day after. That might take a while!

Kaleb is taking the subway downtown, and the three of us are planning on going out to either the Absolut Ice Bar (here in our hotel) or some other evening establishment. Should be fun!



**Back home in the morning (2009-07-28 15:18)**

I'm uploading pictures from the 26th to Flickr right now (see the 26th - relaxing post-wedding day or the start of the 27th - Stockholm boat trip here). We're packed and ready to grab breakfast and catch a train to the airport tomorrow morning. So my next update will probably be from the States!





We're in love with Sweden. It's been an unbelievable trip, and we've just loved spending time with Kaleb and Karin and with Karin's wonderful family. Tears have been shed upon leaving.



On the upside, our time here has proven to us how important our friends are to us, and we're already starting to think about future trips we can take together.

Until tomorrow,

Althea



## Planes, trains, and automobiles (2009-07-28 22:33)

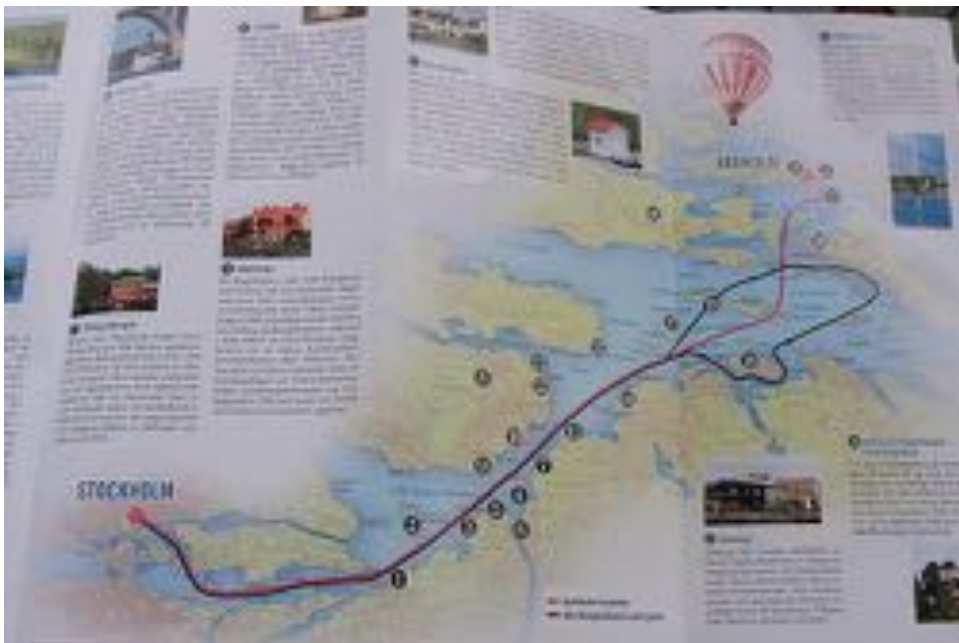
I guess a more accurate title would be "planes, trains, automobiles, and boats." We spent several hours yesterday (Tuesday, July 28) on a boat (the Stockholm) sailing out to the archipelago town of Vaxholm. Not really sailing since it was a big triple-decker ship. You can see lovely pictures on the Stromma Kanalbolaget website. You can see somewhat less lovely pictures (it was a drizzly day) in my photo gallery.



The boat tour had been recommended by several people here as well as my aunt Julie, who has visited the area before. We thought it was great! Next time we're in the country, I'd love to travel further out in the archipelago to see the open sea.



My brain is only working at half speed this morning. I woke up at (what turned out to be) 5am. I looked at my computer, and the clock said 10pm. I added seven hours to that and came up with 6am. So I got up, took a shower, and when I came out, Bryan was also dressed and ready. Then we looked at the clock again, and Bryan said, "It's 5:40am." Oops. He went back to sleep. I've been editing and uploading pictures. And right now (at 7:30am local time...12:30am CDT), I have to raise my eyebrows to keep my eyes open. I guess maybe I'll be sleeping on the plane ride home.



Our flight is supposed to leave at 10:15am, so we'll be heading off to the airport in the next 15 minutes or so.

Catcha later!

Althea

### **Home (2009-07-30 04:12)**

I woke up in my own bed, in North America, at 3am. I'd been having a dream that the sun was shining in my windows and I was asleep but had to squinch my eyes shut to keep out the brightness. It would have been 10am in Sweden. When I opened my eyes, I was startled to find that it was pitch dark.

Spooky and Bowser have been purring and rubbing and drooling (yeah, Spook's a drooler). They're both so happy to have us home. Bowser spent hours last night curled up around my head, kneading at my scalp in some kind of kitty ecstasy.

Our flight home was completely uneventful...just the way I like it. While I wouldn't say that international economy plane rides are tons of fun, I kept feeling so grateful that I wasn't trying to amuse a small child. I got to read all of *The Time Traveler's Wife*. I edited Kaleb and Karin's wedding pictures until my computer ran out of juice. I watched a couple silly movies. The airplane we were on (Scandinavian Airlines) has a little touch monitor on the back of each seat. You could play games (sudoku, mahjong), watch moives (*Monsters v. Aliens*, *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953)), and the coolest part, watch what was going on in front of or below the airplane. They had a forward and a downward camera, so you could watch take-off and landing and when the clouds parted, you could see the land far below.



This was taken by someone else, but it looks similar to what we were seeing. Ours had a bit less snow (it is July now and this was taken in February!).

Even when we were super-high (36,000 feet), the clouds moved away, and we were able to get an amazing view of Greenland. Glaciers. Mountains. Craters. Icebergs. Coastline. It was really stunning. Those are some big glaciers. Big, receding glaciers.

When we landed in Chicago, we got close to the runway and then (I think we were going too fast) lifted up again and circled for a while before re-landing. I hold it as a big personal victory that I didn't throw up. There were some other very green people sitting nearby.

When you fly into Chicago, you get your bags, go through immigrations and customs and then re-check your bags before taking a train to another terminal to fly out. I got some caramel corn from Nuts on Clark. mmmm

Dad picked us up at the airport, and we and our bags all made it home unscathed. Since we woke up at 5am Stockholm time, and didn't sleep on the plane, it was a looong day. Bryan got a burst of energy and unpacked and mowed. I finished my first cut of the wedding pictures (it takes a long time to look through 2,700 images!).

The kids arrive with Granny this afternoon, so Bryan and I enjoyed one last dinner date before crashing hard into bed just before 8pm.

I'm surprised at how fine I've felt being away from the kids. Andrew sounds completely at home in Texas. When we Skyped with him the other day, he kept saying, "When you come down here..." He even cheerfully declared, "I don't even remember Madison!" So he's at home. Sounds like Syliva has been fine too. Probably more than fine! And Granny sounded like she was having a wonderful time with them. I do miss my girl, and I am really looking forward to having that little baby body close to mine again. My mom called it a bungee umbilical cord. It stretches (farther and farther) and then it goes, "Booiiiiiooiiiing, back to Mom."



So the kids come home early afternoon. That'll give me time to pack for Jack's weekend (we leave tomorrow), clean up the house a bit, do a finer-grained edit of the wedding photos, and relax a while before life gets real busy again.

Thanks for everyone who followed our trip and who commented on my posts. It felt really, really cool to be traveling so far from home but knowing I was connecting with so many people I care about. What a neat thing this Internet is! Pictures from the the trip are/will be all available here.

Take care!

Althea

### **My kids are home! (2009-07-30 14:19)**

Bryan's mom (the saint!) flew from Texas to Madison with both my kids today. They arrived in the Madison airport appearing happy and calm. Sounds like the flight went very well. Andrew came pelting across the room to me, and Sylvia (once she figured out where I was) did the same. I can't get over how beautiful and amazing my kids are. It feels good to have them back!

Sylvie is taking a nap now. She now apparently only uses Poodle and her pacifier when she's sleeping (yay!), and she nodded a bit ago when I asked her if she wanted to lie down.

Granny stays until tomorrow afternoon, and we'll be heading to Jack's afterwords. From one fun adventure to the next! We get back from our weekend on the Wisconsin River on Sunday afternoon. After that, we have no plans until preschool starts in September.

So if we've missed seeing you over the last six weeks of Dotzour family visitors and travels, let's get together in August!

And please hope for not-rainy weather this weekend. At least on Saturday, a sunny day is best!

### **Sweden album complete (2009-07-30 15:33)**

I spent my last hours of childlessness this morning editing Kaleb and Karin's wedding pictures and uploading the last sets of photos from our Sweden trip to my Flickr gallery. There's lots of pictures from our trip! They're organized by day, so you can just browse a little if you'd like.

Sweden, July 2009



Here's some of the many pictures I've just uploaded:











## 5.8 August

Jack's weekend 2009 (2009-08-02 20:46)



One of my favorite sights in all the world. The view from Jack's front door.

We're back home after a wonderful weekend at Jack's house. My family has been going out to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River since before I was born. See here for pictures from past trips. Heather, Michael, and Evelyn flew in from DC for the weekend. Kyle came up sans Marettta (SNIFF!!) because she's in a play with the Minnesota Fringe Festival this weekend. Dad drove in on Saturday, which was a treat. Bev joined us from Iowa. Tom's friend Asta and her kids came out too. We had a big group - 19 people on Saturday night!

Bryan, the kids, and I camped up on the hill, which was a great experience. We ate waaay too much good food. We stayed up too late. We played games and floated down the river, which was chilly this year. We hiked in the prairie. Both kids slept on the two-hour drive home. Ahhh, such a great weekend.

And now we're home. Tonight we had our first dinner with all four of us at home since July 14. The cats are happy to have us back. Laundry is being washed. I'm scheming when I can get us to a campground next.

Thanks, Jack, for hosting us. I just love it when we're all together!



**Jack's weekend in pictures (2009-08-03 08:40)**

What a great weekend! A full set of pictures are in the gallery. Some samples are pasted below...









What a lovely weekend. I wish it could have lasted all week long.

### **Fairs, rain, and French toast (2009-08-08 10:18)**

Home, sweet, home. The week snuck by without me writing a post. Oops! I wasn't taking pictures, and I thought about posting several times, but without beautiful pictures to insert, it seemed a little less than ideal. Oh well. Maybe I'll pull other images to spice up this post.

So our week was a good one! Tom helped watch my kids on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. I've been hard at work on Althea Dotzour Photography, and having a few hours to focus on that during the day makes such a difference. I'd had a horrible incident of photo disk corruption and had to re-shoot a session, but my clients were lovely and understanding. Here's a favorite picture from the re-shoot.

x

On Wednesday, Andrew had his four-year-old doctor's appointment. He now weighs 37lbs (61 percentile), and is 3' 5.5" tall (70 percentile). The kid's growing like a bean. He had fun showing the doctor how he can snap and hop and skip. It's neat to watch him grow.

Syliva went back to Donna's for a morning of daycare on Wednesday. She was happy to go back, and went happily into Donna's arms. I think she has so much fun there!



On Thursday, I decided we needed an adventure, so I piled the kids in the car and gave them some clues about where we were going ("Moo" "Weee!!" and "Yum!"). We drove to Milwaukee for the Wisconsin State Fair. I wanted to take neat pictures of the rides and animals and crowds. However, I'll count the fact that we went and had a good time and that we all left relatively unscathed to be the limit of what I was able to accomplish. No photography.



Andrew and Sylvia loved the rides. Andrew had fun going on several by himself, and Sylvia adored the carousels and the train. While the rides were going, she squealed and vibrated in delight. She flipped out when they ended...she wanted them to go on and on and on.

Both kids loved seeing the animals. We wandered through all the livestock barns and even got to see some camels. Then we enjoyed some fair food before things totally melted down. Sylvia got her fingers pinched in a bathroom door while I was washing Andrew's hands, and then Andrew's leg got stepped on by somebody (it was really crowded!). Holding two sad kids, and pushing the stroller, we high-tailed it out of the fair.

So we didn't get to eat one of these:

x

cream puff!!

Oh well. My pants are a little tight since getting back from Sweden, so I guess a cup of whipped cream wasn't really necessary. mmmm whipped cream. mmmmmm

Yesterday (Friday) was a rainy day. Jessica, Eli, and Celia came over in the morning, and we decided to walk to the library even though it was drizzling. By the time we were ready to head home, it was raining, and the girls didn't want to be in the stroller. So the boys got in the stroller, we propped the umbrella over our books, and Jessica, the babies, and I walked home in the rain. I like a good walk in the rain. Reminds me of when Heather and I used to wear long peasant skirts and run and dance in the whooshing rain together. Makes me smile to remember.

Vicki and Alex came over in the afternoon, and the boys had fun pulling out costumes. There was a wedding. We played Johnny Cash's Jackson. Such cuties!

This morning, I made Berg's French Toast from the book *A Homemade Life*. It's pretty much normal French Toast except cooked in oil in a cast-iron skillet. Oh, so good. You'll want to try this one. Believe me. Here's the recipe!



photo by [makeawhisk.com](http://makeawhisk.com) Note: I omitted the butter since the toast was fried in oil!

I'm off this afternoon to my first APT play in their new indoor Touchstone Theater. Terry, Jack, and I are seeing *Old Times*. If the rain and thunder stop, we'll also be seeing *Hay Fever* in the outdoor theater this evening. Many thanks



to my stellar husband for taking the kids all afternoon long while I enjoy some theater!

x

Photo by Zane Williams

If the weather is fair tomorrow, Andrew, Bryan, and my dad are going to a Mallards baseball game. I bet they'll have lots of fun!

Feuf! That was a long post! I'll sign off now. Hope your week was good too!

Oh, PS. I wanted to share that Sylvia is very nervous about thunder and other loud noises these days. When an airplane goes over or a big truck goes by, she runs to me, wraps her arms around me, and buries her sweet head in my neck. This in turn gives me no incentive to convince her that she shouldn't be afraid. In fact, as I feel her little hands clinging to me, I am tempted to tell her that she should, in fact, always come to me when she hears those bad, scary noises.

### **How do you get coins out of a tape player? (2009-08-11 10:05)**

So I made a bit of a parenting judgment error this morning. Andrew and Eli were playing in my car, and I thought they were fine. They looked fine from out the window. And they were fine, if fine includes putting my change in interesting cracks in the interior of the car.



by macten

I spent a while out there with a needle-nose pliers, tweezers, a thin-bladed knife, and tooth picks. Many quarters, dimes, nickles, and pennies have been removed. However, two batches of them are giving me trouble. There's five or more coins in one of the vents. They rattle like a piggy bank. Not sure if they'll slip back into the fan or if they'll just hang tight where they are...

The sad one is that a couple coins are stuck in my tape player. I have an iPod tape in there, and it won't play or come out. I can't actually see the coins, so they must have fallen down into the mechanics. I looked online and saw some suggestions for putting duct tape on the end of a chopstick to get coins out of a tape player (good to know this happens to others!), but at this point the tape is blocking the area.

Oh well. The boys now are clear on the concept that coins should not be put anywhere unusual and if they have questions on that, they should ask an adult!

Any suggestions for removing my extra change are welcome!

#### **Found! (2009-08-11 10:28)**

Last month, I posted about how I had lost Andrew's shoes and orange jacket. Well, his shoes are still gone, but Jessica called last night to tell me that she'd just found Andrew's orange fleece jacket in the basement dress-up box! The jacket is back on its hook in our home.



I love the feeling of having lost things found. Thanks Jessica!!

### **Brain ache (2009-08-11 15:57)**

It may have been caused by almost an hour of this:

[flickr video=3813066932]

I went to the UW Credit Union with Sylvia today (Andrew was at an Aldo Leopold Nature Center class). My sweet girl was darling and flirtatious for the first 20 minutes. Then I took her to the bathroom and she wanted to wash her hands (without end), and when I took her away from the sink, she screamed screamed for about 40 minutes. This video is taken on the drive home\*.

Soon after, I felt a searing pain in my temples, I was seeing spots, and I had a strong desire to throw up or go to sleep. If I'm 70 and seeing a neurologist about brain troubles, I'm pointing the finger at least in part at my sweet daughter's mind-destroyingly shrill, persistent screeching.

I don't condone the filming of videos while driving. I was desperate. I pointed the camera at here while I was stopped and held it with one hand while facing forward driving. Just so you know:)

## Half-birthday! (2009-08-11 19:57)

Sylvia turned 18-months-old today! She's a year-and-a-half old. Wow. I thought about making cupcakes, I mean, any excuse for cupcakes, right?



My dear, sweet girl, I love you so much I can hardly stand it. I'm sorry that we're sometimes at odds with each other, but know my dear, that I'm always on your side. You're my Roman Candle, burning so brightly and lighting up our lives every day. I can't wait to see you tomorrow and the next day and the day after that.

As you doze in your crib, you long limbs all akimbo, I'm thinking of you and sending you love and wishes for a wonderful next six-months. Dream on, sweet baby.

A song for you tonight, my girl. Here are the lyrics for one of my favorite songs: Night Mantra by Renee & Jeremy.

I will be your home  
I will be your guide  
I will be your friend  
always on your side

sleep now in your room  
quiet of the night  
surrounded by the moon  
till you see the light



Also just a little thought. This afternoon, after you'd been so very unhappy for such a very long time, we finally got home, to your room. We found Poodle and your paci, I pulled the shade and held you and sang to you in the dark of your bedroom. You laid your hot, damp head on my chest and let your cries quiet, hiccuping occasionally. At one point I asked if I should keep holding you, and you nodded, not lifting your head from me.

I'm so glad that after some tantruming sadness, we can come back together, letting the song The Water is Wide soothe the hurts and allowing our calm touch to balm our spirits. Thanks for being my little girl, darling one. I love you.



### **Tricycle decisions - assistance requested (2009-08-12 09:15)**

Andrew loves his trike! You may remember that last spring I was trying to decide whether I should get him a bigger tricycle (he'd outgrown the one he was using) or if I should get him a glider or a bike with training wheels. I got him the bike with training wheels, and it turns out that he strongly avoided riding it. "I'll ride it tomorrow, Mom!"

So mid-summer, I found a big tricycle at a garage sale ( \$4, baby!), and Andrew's been zipping up and down the driveway on it all the time. But now I've got a little problem, and her name is... Let me rephrase. Sylvia wants to ride the tricycle too. But it's too big for her - it's just too high for her to sit on without probably falling off. So I would like to get her her own trike.

Here's where I would like your help. I thought I was going to get her the kind of trike Andrew had been using, the Radio Flyer Steer and Stroll trike. I loved being able to push Andrew without having to bend over while walking down the road. I liked being able to steer him when we were crossing streets. I like that it has a seat belt because Sylvia is prone to deciding she wants to stop what she's doing mid-ride, and a seat belt might help her dive off the trike this summer.





#### Radio Flyer Steer and Stroll

However, since a couple of my friends have this trike, it's probable that Sylvia will get experience riding it. Maybe it would be fun to get her something different. The trike I almost got for Andrew when I was deciding between a bike with training wheels and a trike might be a good match: the Schwinn Roadster.

x

#### Schwinn Roadster

It's such a cute trike! And it sounds like it works for one-four-year-olds. I'm kind of leaning toward this one, but now I can't decide color. I love the red. Red trikes are so classic and pert. In general, I'm not a fan of pink, but look at this cute bike:

x

#### Pink Roadster

Oh decisions, decisions. I think I need some help on this one...

### **Tantrum diagnostics (2009-08-12 11:46)**

Last night was a very quiet, peaceful evening, just me and my computer, and it gave me some good time to poke around online reading about other spirited toddlers and finding solace and humor in community. It also gave me time to think about what has been happening the last couple days to set Sylvia up so that she is primed to have such lengthy, fierce tantrums. And I think it's about sleep and communication.

Since Andrew's been doing swim lessons at 10am this week, Sylvia isn't getting a mid-morning nap. Yesterday I put her down for a nap at 11:30, but she only played in her crib for an hour. So our 1pm trip to bank was sort of set up for a melt-down. Her half-hour tantrum at the pool-side on Monday morning was probably in part because she (really) wanted to get into the water, but the tantrum was certainly stronger and longer because she was really ready to take a nap right at that time. It just sometimes helps to know that there are reasons for these things.

My girl has really liked it when I speak in "Toddler-ese" to her (see *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*). Andrew liked this technique too. Sylvia really doesn't say many words yet, but she understands so much, and she gets amazingly frustrated when she doesn't think I "get" what she's saying. For example,

On the way home from Donna's today, I stopped by Java Cat to get a javalato (coffee ice cream drink with whipping cream on top, ohhh yeaahhhh). Sylvie could tell it was something good, and she was pointing at it and clearly indicating that she wanted some. When I said, "I'll give you a taste when we get home," she got really mad and started to flip. So I said something along the following:

"Sylvie is MAD! She is MAD MAD MAD! She is mad that Mama won't give a taste RIGHT NOW. Mama is driving and said she will give Sylvie a taste when we get home, but Sylvie wants a taste NOW! No wait! Now! Mama says soon. Sylvie says NOW. Mama says that we are almost home. Almost home. Oh look, there's our house. Sylvie says NOW, and Mama says, 'Here we are. We are home. Let's get out and have a taste.'"

The whole time I'm talking, Sylvie is very quiet and calm...unless I stop noting her feelings and try to make it all better. But in general (not yesterday, but in general), she'll stop tantruming on a dime if I repeat...kind of yell...back to her what I think she's feeling. Then she feels heard and understood, which I think is a very important thing for these kiddos!

Hopefully some good naps today will help make our day a more joyful one!

### **Mudpuppies and swim lessons (2009-08-12 12:50)**

Andrew's had a busy summer week! We signed him up for swim lessons at the Monona pool, and we've been enjoying meeting up with Jessica, Eli, and Celia to walk down to the pool for some lessons. When I was young, Michael and I took diving lessons at the Monona pool with Tammy Wiswell's kids. And when I was younger, we would

meet up with Carol Schroder's family and walk a few blocks to the Lakeview Branch library. It's fun to be doing kinda the same thing 25 years later with my own kids!

Andrew is enjoying his swimming class. I haven't seen his hair get wet yet, but he's feeling increasingly comfortable in the water, and he's having a good time, which is the whole idea:)

On Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, Andrew and Eli are both taking a class at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center on salamanders. They're supposed to go to class on Wednesday wearing clothes they can get dirty in. What a great place! I'm so glad Andrew can take fun classes like that.

Sylvia wants, wants, wants to take fun classes too. She did not want to leave Andrew there today. That set off a major tantrum session. It's hard, being the younger sib. I'm looking forward to taking her to Toddler Time on Tuesdays at Monona Grove Nursery School this fall!

In the meantime, we're enjoying lots of summery August activities!

### **Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, how do I love thee (2009-08-14 12:18)**

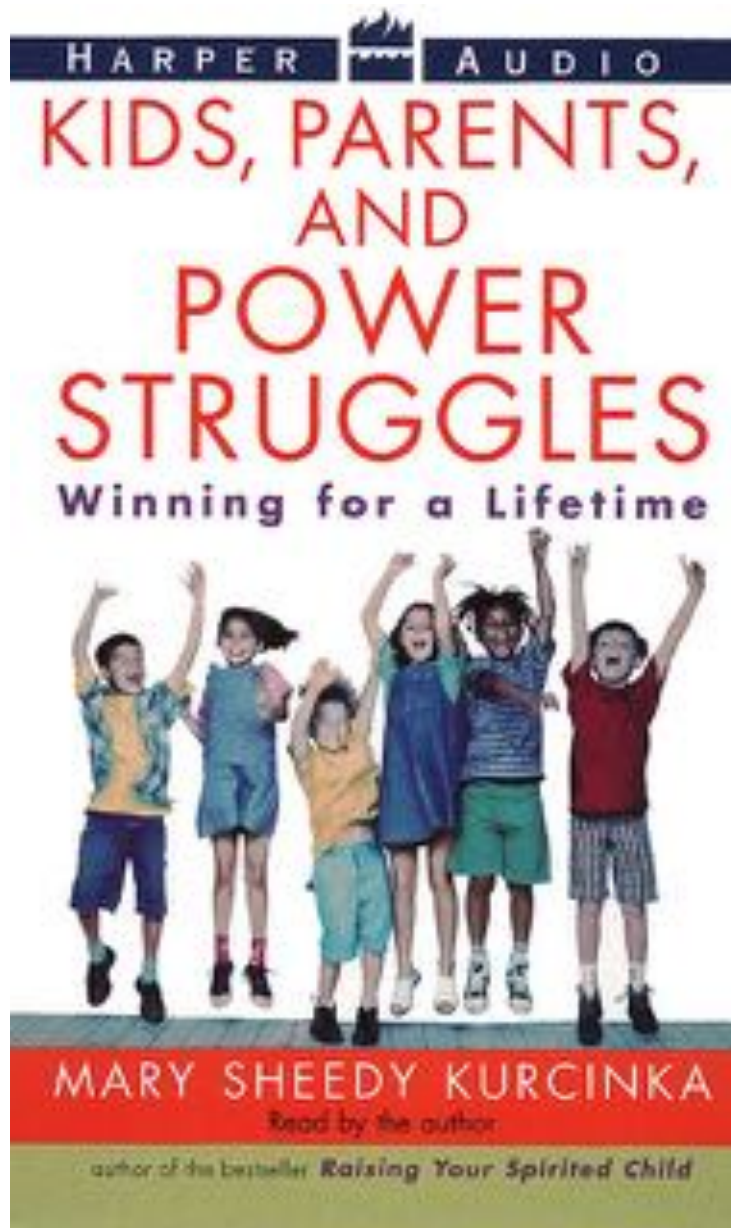
It's been a good day. My car has new rear brakes, and my mechanic was able to remove the last of the coins from my vents and even fixed the tape player.

While Andrew and Eli splashed around at the Monona pool during their lesson this morning, a baby-sitter watched the girls back at home. Such luxury to sit pool-side with a dear friend for a half-hour, laughing and relaxing. Celia's having a bit of trouble this week with her 2-year-old molars. Our normally sunshine-y girl has been kinda sad.

Sylvia is taking a nice nap right now, and I sat down with a copy of Mary Sheedy Kurcinka's book *Kids, Parents, and Power Struggles: Winning for a lifetime*. Mary wrote *Raising Your Spirited Child*, which I love. And I'm loving this book too. Check out this lovely quote from the first page:

"Recognizing...emotions [yours and your child's] is the key to stopping power struggles before they ever start. Responding to those emotions builds the relationship that makes your child want to work with you.

Discipline isn't just about winning or losing. Every power struggle offers you the opportunity to connect with your child or to disconnect. The relationship you have with your child when he's an adolescent lies in the words and actions you use today. Ultimately your real power is in that emotional bond."



I swear that my mom could have written that passage. I love reading Mary Sheedy Kurcinka because she makes me feel so good. She re-frames situations and offers understanding, compassion, great suggestions, and lots of fun and hope. I've found her books to be as useful for Andrew as they are for Sylvia. It's always so neat to run across something that feels so right.

I'll enjoy these last moments of a nap and keep on a-reading!

## **Quotes (2009-08-15 08:18)**

I've been to several plays in the last week, and I'm reading Andrew a great story book, and I have all these lovely quotes floating around in my head, so I thought I'd share.

From Harold Pinter's play *Old Times*, which was performed at the new indoor theater at American Players Theater. Terry looked this one up and sent me the text. Johnathan Smoots delivered this line:

Of course she's so totally incompetent at drying herself properly, did you find that? She gives herself a really good scrub, but can she with the same efficiency give herself an equally good rub? I have found, in my experience of her, that this is not in fact the case. You'll always find a few odd unexpected unwanted cheeky globules dripping about.

From Jame Thurber's book *The 13 Clocks*, first published in 1950. Here's where we first meet the princess:

The Princess Saralinda was tall, with freesias in her dark hair, and she wore serenity brightly like a rainbow. ... Her voice was faraway music, and her eyes were candles burning on a tranquil night. She moved across the room like wind in violets, and her laughter sparkled on the air, which, from her presence, gained a faint and undreamed fragrance.

The Duke in this story is as evil as the Princess is lovely:

His hands were as cold as his smile and almost as cold as his heart. He wore gloves when he was awake, which made it difficult for him to pick up pins or coins or the kernels of nuts, or to tear the wings from nightingales.

I saw Jim DeVita's one-man show *Acting Shakespeare* last night, and it was wonderful. (Here's an interview he did about the show.) There were quite a few memorable lines, but Sylvia has come over and requested that I read her *Global Babies*, so I'll sign off!

## **Raspberries! (2009-08-17 14:40)**

On Sunday morning, Pam, her two girls, and my two kids piled into my van, and we all drove down to Blue Skies Berry Farm for a morning of raspberry picking and playing outdoors. Pictures of our outing are available [here](#).



I haven't seen Pam or her girls much recently, so it was especially nice to spend a few hours plucking ripe red berries from bushes and fast as little hands could grab. Our friend Drew and his little girl joined us as well.





The weather has been on the rainy side the past few days. We walked to swimming lessons this morning through a light drizzle. I've noticed that it's mid-August because I've had a strong desire to pull off my nose and itch the top of my throat. Ragweed. However, this year I am neither nursing nor pregnant, so I can medicate all I want to. Unfortunately, I don't really like to take allergy medicines. But I just sneezed as I typed that line, so I might as well go talk to a pharmacist!

Here's a few more images from the raspberry patch:









### **Swim lessons complete (2009-08-20 12:31)**

What a lovely Thursday! The morning was rainy and cloudy, but the sun is shimmering through the trees right now. Sylvie is napping, Andrew is off fishing with our neighbors (Jenni and Kaysi), and I just created a Facebook page for my photography business. Look me up!

I've worked on my photography website the last few nights, and I've got to a place where I think I'm going to be "releasing it" by doing more promotion. Check it out at [Althea Dotzour Photography](#). Let me know if you have suggestions or problems navigating it. I'd love to hear feedback from friends before future clients really dive in.

This morning Sylvia had her 18-month doctor's appointment. She got three vaccinations, the poor dear. The whole appointment, she really wanted to leave the room. I'm glad that we're done with shots (except flu vaccines) until she turns 5!

Andrew's last swimming lesson was this morning. He had such a good time! I'm really glad Jessica suggested it! Andrew loved playing in the water. He seems really comfortable hopping around in the shallow end, blowing bubbles, etc. He's been announcing to everyone that he's bobbing his head underwater. In fact, he's only going



under up to his eyebrows, but it's progress, and it's great to see him so delighted with himself.

I'm going to American Players Theater this evening to see Henry V. It'll be like my sixth APT performance of the summer, and I can't wait! I'm going out with a group of my mom friends, and I still have to get the ingredients for my part of the potluck. At least I have three hours. Until I should be there. Showered. Hmm. Maybe I should get going on all this.

Sylvia's wonderful pink Cruiser tricycle came in the mail today. Andrew helped me put it together, and Sylvia already loves it. Photos will come soon. It's a very photogenic tricycle.

### **Bike'n babes (2009-08-22 10:14)**

Andrew and Sylvia have been loving zooming up and down the driveway on their bikes. I took lots of pictures, and the following album includes biking pics as well as Andrew fishing, swinging on swings, swimming, and going for a walk in the rain.



Sarah and Wes' baby, Charlie, turned one this week. Hard to believe!! We're attending his birthday party this afternoon, and I'm looking forward to seeing the little fellow. We haven't gotten together much these last few months, and somehow, he's morphed from a baby to a near-toddler!





I have a couple photo sessions scheduled this weekend. One this evening with a neighbor and one on Sunday morning with a little baby who is also heading toward one waaay too fast! I've just charged my battery so I'm ready for a lot of picture-taking.



I've gotten some nice response to my Althea Dotzour Photography website and Facebook release. If you haven't already, look me up and become a fan! Also, I'm running a special through the end of the month of 50 % off the session fee. You can reach me at [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com) to set up a session. More info is available on my business website.



This last week has been really nice. Sylvia's moods have been in better check, I've gotten together with friends a lot, and off and on, the weather has been lovely. Yesterday, Kathy and I put all our kids in one car and took them to the Children's Museum. It was a rainy day, and the museum was a mad-house. But it was a lot of fun. Until 11am when Sylvia needed a nap and melted down. But it felt like an adventure, and it was a good way to start the day.



Our neighbors, Jenni and Kaysi took Andrew fishing last week. He caught 18 bluegill! It was his first fish-catching experience (and one of his first experiences going on an outing like this without me or Bryan), and he loved it! Jenni filleted the fish, and when we have enough, we're going to have a fish fry together.



Sylvia is loving her new trike. It fits her really well, and it looks like it will grow well with her too. It's just so cute that it hurts my teeth. Andrew has been amazing about the fact that his sister got a new bike. He helped me

put it together, and he has been encouraging her to use it and helping her with it. We don't often get a big present on a non-holiday, and it's been so nice to see that Andrew hasn't felt slighted. I encouraged him to pull out his training-wheel bike, and he really took to it. Last night he even wanted to keep riding after the rest of us were going in. Makes me glad to know that he feels more comfortable with that bike now.



Last night, while we watched Battlestar Galactica (and then for about three hours after that) I finished editing the pictures from a photo session I did a couple weeks ago. My client is a friend from high school with whom I hadn't spoken in years and years. We re-connected through the magic of Facebook, and I had a great time at the Leopold Nature Center taking pictures of her and her husband with their adorable little girl. I'll be posting some of my favorites to my new photography blog.



I really had a hard time picking pictures to include in this post. You should check out the whole set so you don't miss any cuteness!

### **Hardest week of my life (2009-08-24 15:15)**

My body is reacting a little to this last week in August. I've been having a hard time sleeping.

Two years ago today was the last day that my sweet mom was present. It was a Friday. She said goodbye to Joe, who was leaving for college. Christy Parks was visiting. All the previous week, her health had been declining oh, so rapidly. Many of her dearest friends had visited. She ate a lot of strong, salty foods. She slept a lot. She hurt.





Coneflower and bergamont from the prairie last week

After Joe got in the car and drove away, Mom said she was really tired and needed to sleep. I don't remember having any back-and-forth communication with her after that. Saturday she told me she was tired. She took her pain killers. Maybe we were still trying to encourage her to eat...I don't remember. In any case, by Sunday it became clear that the end was fast approaching. On Monday morning, she was at the Hospice center. She (at least for me) had slipped below the surface. She fought that last week. She didn't want to die. Really, really didn't want to die.

My mom wanted to keep living. She savored life, and she so wanted our lives to go on together...all of us woven like a tapestry. We just don't get to choose our path, though. Sometimes things, like pancreatic cancer, just happen. They just happen and we deal and everyone moves on.





I got this shirt for Sylvia a few weeks after my mom died. Yesterday I found it at a resale shop in a bigger size. I think of it as Grandma Margot sheep with baby Sylvie lamb.

Oh, but I miss my mom. I still want to talk to her so often. I want to share Sylvia with her. She would love Sylvia so much. She deserved to know her granddaughter. It makes me so sad to think of the Grandma Margot loving that Sylvia and Andrew don't get because she's not here. And the Andrew and Sylvia loving that my mom doesn't get because she's not here.

I don't fret about it every day. I don't feel sad about it most weeks. But this week is hard. It took me all of last year to process the fact that she is gone. To deal with the reality that she spent a month dying as we tried to ease her way. This year, for the most part, has been easier.



Mom gave this sunflower notepad to me when I left for college. She inscribed the first page.

But Mom, as that golden late-August sun filters down through the maple tree in our front yard, I just wish that you were still here to see it too. Your family loves you, Mom. For we are your little bunnies.

...

I still think this poem does a nice job of capturing how I feel about where Mom is right now:

#### Hopi Prayer

Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there.  
I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on the ripened grain.  
I am the gentle Autumn's rain.

When you awaken in the morning hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
I am not there.  
I did not die.

PS. For those of you new to my blog, the back-story to Mom's two-and-a-half year experience with cancer can be found at the beginning of this category.

PPS. My heart has also been heavy this week because we're approaching the three-year anniversary of Allan Lerner's birthday. His due date was August 27, and he was born still on September 2. To my dear friends Heather and Michael, I'm thinking about you.

### **Sylvie being cute (2009-08-25 12:10)**

I took this video a couple weeks ago. It's not spectacular, but it shows sweet Sylvie saying "bye bye" while opening and closing the gate and being her adorable self.

[flickr video=3854167564]

### **Family potluck (2009-08-25 13:32)**

Joe and Becky head back to school today. They're driving to Maine through Canada by driving up through the UP. Joe goes to school at Bowdoin in Maine, and Becky goes to school at Williams in Massachusetts. Click here for a map of (what I'm guessing is) their route.



On Sunday night, Bryan and I hosted a potluck picnic to send Joe and Becky off. Maretta and Kyle happen to live in Minnesota, so they were unable to attend, but Michael and Lisa, Terry, Tom, and Dad, and Joe and Becky all came over. We grilled out and ate at the picnic table. Frisbees were thrown after dinner. Blueberry cobbler with cream was consumed. It was a lovely night, and I'll remember it fondly for a long time.



I think that both Joe and Becky are going to enjoy a wonderful year back at their colleges. Joe's a senior! If you haven't read his blog, you can catch it here: <http://platosfootnotes.net>



Michael and Lisa's wedding is coming up on October 10, so we'll all be together again before too long!







**Yay, babysitter! (2009-08-25 18:14)**

(4pm) I'm writing to you from the quiet comfort of Java Cat coffee shop. Emma is home with my children. In about 10 minutes, I'm going to go to Woodman's grocery store by myself. In the middle of the day. Who thought that going to Woodman's would be a luxury? We'll have food in the house!

Emma is home from college this week, so I'm taking advantage of her proximity (she lives next door). When she first came over, I cleaned the kitchen, did a load of laundry, and in other ways straightened my life. Ahhh.

Thanks, Emma! I hope you and the kiddos are having fun!



### **Investments (2009-08-26 09:42)**

Bryan and I have had Roth IRAs (for retirement) since we got married in 1999. We also have retirement accounts through our employers. I've done some reading about investments and retiring (one of my favorite resources is the Motley Fool), but in general, our investments (which we have with Charles Schwab) aren't something we think about very much.

Earlier this year, we purchased a new life insurance policy for Bryan. The man who sold us the life insurance is a financial planner, and Bryan and I met with him this morning to get his assessment of our retirement savings.



This is a chart Matt gave us to illustrate the periods of flat market over the last 100 years

Matt Cuplin with Midwest Financial Group is a nice guy. He was thorough and good at answering questions. (See here for info on working with a financial manager!) His main advice was that Bryan and I switch gears from the traditional "buy and hold" theory of investing and move to a system where we more actively manage our investments.

Currently, we have our funds in a couple aggressive mutual funds (Schwab MarketTrack All Equity is the main one). They've been there for 10 years. There's been growth, there's been decline. Frankly, I don't even read the statements more than once a year because our approach has been that over time, (and we've got a lot of time until retirement) the accounts will go up. So why sweat it on the short term? The fees are low, and history has showed that stocks are a good bet in the long-term.

The downside of working with money managers is that you have to pay them. And in general, I'm not so in to paying fees on my investments. Matt's argument is that actively managed funds do better in a "flat market." The money managers pull back on stocks (re-allocate) during flat periods and then re-invest in stocks when things pick up. Overall, this approach is supposed to lead to higher returns.

Matt is recommending that we move our funds to a company called Flexible Plan Investments. His information shows that their aggressive fund out-performs the Index in a 10-year period. Its benchmark return (after fees) is

a couple points higher than what we've been getting on either of our funds.

Matt's argument is that by actively managing our investments, we'll earn enough more that we'll cover the 2 % fee plus (which covers himself and the we'll have more in the bank.

Sooo, I think we're going to try it. We've done the other approach for 10 years, we'll give this approach a spin for a while.

That said, if anyone out there has sage advice about investing or spots any red flags in this scenario, please let me know!

**Grace (2009-08-27 11:24)**

Thank you, thank you, thank you to all the people out there who sent me loving, encouraging, thoughtful notes after I posted about this being the two-year anniversary of my my mom's death. I've felt comforted, and in the days since I wrote that post, I've stopped feeling sad. Instead, I feel calm. It helps me a lot to be able to pour out my messy thoughts, and then to (amazingly, it seems) feel the responses come spilling back, feel the support and the community in which I live.

The last couple nights, I've been sleeping well again. I still miss that my mom isn't here, but the anniversary part of it feels alright.

So thanks for reading and sending back loving notes and prayers and thoughts. I appreciate them all. You make me feel like dancing.



Mom and Andrew - March 2006

## 5.9 September

**same kind of different as me (2009-09-01 09:16)**

I really enjoyed reading the book *Same Kind of Different As Me* by Ron Hall and Denver Moore. It's a neat book about a friendship between homeless Denver and affluent, evangelical Ron. Over the course of the book, Ron's wife dies of cancer. It was a therapeutic book to read over the last week.



A couple quotes that stuck with me:

I remember one time I was hunkered down in the hobo jungle with some folks. We was talkin 'bout life, and this fella was talkin, and said, "People think they're in control, but they ain't. The truth is, that which must befall thee must befall thee. And that which must pass thee by must pass thee by."  
You'd be surprised what you can learn talkin to homeless people. I learned to accept life for what it is.

... and later

The truth about it is, whether rich or poor or somethin in between, this earth ain't no final restin place. So in a way, we is all homeless-just working our way toward home.

Tomorrow is the three-year anniversary of little Allen Lerner's birth. Here's a post I wrote back in 2006. September 1st was the day that they discovered that he was no longer alive. My heart is full of sadness for the baby who I so wish had lived and for the dark and heavy road Heather and Michael have had to travel since then.

Heather and Michael just moved to a new home in Takoma Park last weekend. I'm sending them lots of love, and I'm sure they could use any loving thoughts you can send their way.



## Weekend activities...made it through (2009-09-01 10:43)

I made it through the last week pretty well. Even yesterday, the anniversary of my mom's untimely demise, didn't turn out to be too rough a day. For those of you who missed it in 2007, here's Margot Babler's obituary.



I spent the whole day yesterday doing domestic duties. It took me hours to pull the house back into shape, do a few loads of laundry, vacuum, clean litter boxes, go grocery shopping, and make dinner. I feel proud that neither of the kids sustained any serious injuries while they amused themselves and "helped" me. Simple Mom did a post about balancing housework and parenting. What with all my work on Althea Dotzour Photography, I haven't focused as much on domestic work these past months.

**facebook**

Oh, and by the way, if you're on Facebook, become a fan of Althea Dotzour Photography! If I've taken photos for you, you can write a quick review for me here!

I've done lots of great photo sessions this summer, and I'm excited about getting beautiful autumn portraits over the next few months. Should be a good time to help families get family pictures for Christmas! I'm currently booking sessions for September-November. If you're interested, drop me a note!

Last weekend was chilly to cold. It was hard to believe that it was still August! We've had a cold summer this year! On Saturday morning, Bryan and I bundled up the kids and we went to the Orton Park Festival to hear David Landau sing.

Sylvia was quite intrigued but didn't want to get off my lap to dance. And Andrew was transfixed but wanted to sit on one of our laps well away from the singing/dancing action. It was a beautiful morning for some playground pictures!





Anyone remember this watch? I wore it all through high school. It's now in Andrew's collection.





More pictures are available where those came from!

Shara came over to watch the kids on Saturday afternoon. The wind had picked up, and the sky was wet and gray, so Bryan and I went to a book store, browsed, bought a new card game, and played it while we drank coffee. It was nice to get away together. Sunday morning we had breakfast with Sarah, Wes, and baby Charlie at the Pancake House. It turned out to be a beautiful day, and we enjoyed a lovely afternoon picnic with Bryan's OpGen office mates. When we got home, Andrew and I headed down to Steve and Sally's for the tail-end of a neighborhood picnic. Andrew ate the frosting off four (4) cupcakes. That night, Bryan and Andrew slept outdoors in our tent together. It got down close to 40 degrees, but they were well-bundled, and had a sweet time.

Yesterday evening, Dad, Terry, and Tom came over for dinner. I made a meal of Bryan's Mom's recipes including pumpkin bread, broccoli cheese soup, and oatmeal cookies. We ate out at the picnic table with all my sunflowers blooming nearby. Terry leaves for another month-long driving trip today. His engaging blog is available here. This trip he's exploring upper New England starting with Maine.

We have no plans today. Sylvia won't nap and has been throwing intermittent tantrums. Andrew doesn't want to leave the house. At all. I'm coping by writing blog posts. I'll work on getting Andrew active this afternoon. And work on getting Sylvia in a better mood. Maybe a bike ride would help everyone!

Andrew starts preschool a week from today. So this is our last week of summer! Andrew's buddy Alivia starts her first day of Spanish-immersion kindergarten today. We're thinking of her!!

Maretta called last night to tell us that she's thinking about driving down this weekend. I sure hope they do! I miss that girl so much. We haven't seen her much over the last year!

Hope your week is off to a good start:)



### **Roald Dahl and E.B. White (2009-09-02 12:47)**

Andrew and I have been enjoying reading some lovely chapter books together recently. We just finished James and the Giant Peach, which was great fun. What a silly story! This morning, we started reading The Trumpet of the Swan, and we're both really enjoying it.

I looked for Stewart Little at the library, but it was out. I think we'll read Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and maybe Danny, Champion of the World soon. We read Farmer Boy last winter, and that was quite a hit.

Do you have any suggestions for good books to read aloud to a four-year-old?

### **Shopping with my sister (2009-09-06 19:00)**

✕ Maretta and Kyle are in town for the weekend! It's been such fun to spend the last couple days with them. We haven't seen much of them in the last year it feel like. They live up in St. Paul, and compared to when Maretta, say, lived at home, I don't get to spend as much time in her company!

So this spur-of-the-moment visit was most welcome. I'm glad we had no Labor Day weekend plans!

Bryan went golfing this morning, and Maretta and I got to take off for the afternoon - heading to Hilldale for some therapy sister-shopping. I love shopping with my sister! It's kind of like shopping with my mom. Maretta and I had a leisurely three hours to spend hanging out together. For most of the trip, we didn't purchase anything. But I found a couple items I love and need to share.

The first are these beautiful shoes. Love. I love them. Love love love. I tried them on and gazed upon them. I love their stitching and their redness and their spunk. mmmm





A while later, as I was looking for a new non-diaper bag purse, I ran across this beauty. I love all the pockets and the size and the stitching. I think I'm in to stitching on red leather today.

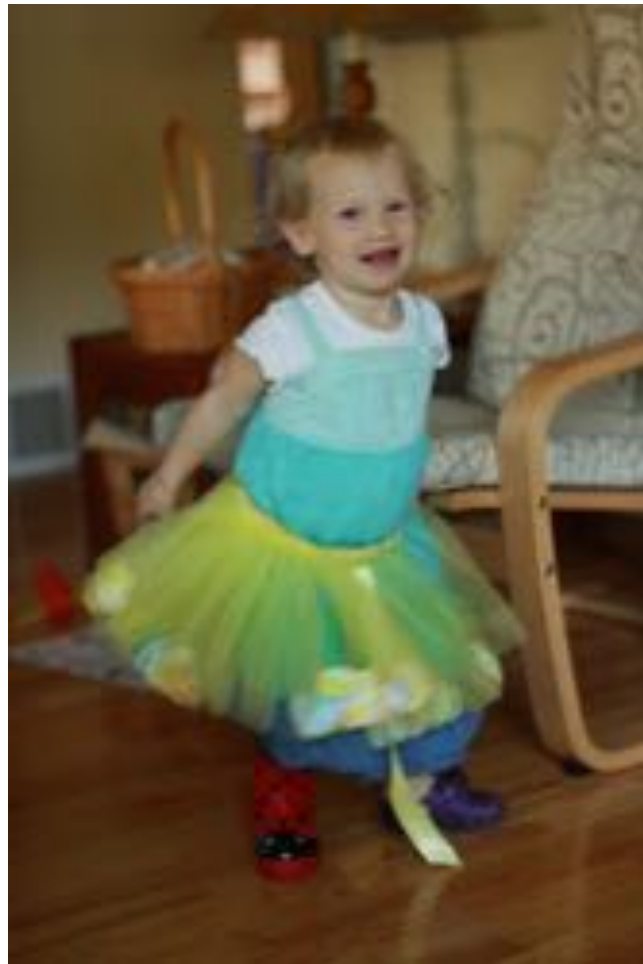
So I restrained myself, which is a good thing, because these would be ridiculous purchases. But I know that some of my readers are lovers of shoes and bags, so enjoy! And let me know if there are items that you've been coveting!

We don't have plans for tomorrow. I'm looking forward to having Bryan home. It's kind of the last day of summer. We'll be enjoying this beautiful weather, I think!

### **Sylvia dresses up (2009-09-07 08:20)**

Sylvia just walked in the room. She's wearing a long blue dress, her yellow petal-filled tutu, a pink sun hat, a red ladybug boot on one foot, a purple croc on the other foot, and a yellow basting brush waving in her hand. And she's quite proud.







## Owls (2009-09-08 03:12)

In the past few years, we've had Great Horned owls nesting in our neighborhood. They're amazing birds, and I feel so grateful that they're hooting near our home. This past month, we've seen lots of the adults and lots of the juveniles. The babies still screech instead of hoot, but other than that, they look a lot like their parents.



This guy here spread his wings out wide as if to intimidate me.



We have lots of owl feathers on the ground in the neighborhood. You can tell they are from owls because they're so fluffy. The downy-ness of their feathers helps make their flight silent - the easier to eat you, my dear!





This one is jumping off his perch and flying away. I don't think he liked me taking his picture very much!

Last spring, the owlets fell out of the tree. You can read about that saga [here](#). I wonder if one of the parents this year is little Hooter!

### **Sunflowers** (2009-09-08 09:00)

Did you know that I love sunflowers? I really do. And this year, I've got a big mess of them growing in my back yard. Here are some pictures to brighten your day.



The sunflowers - yellow and brown - are full of American Goldfinches - yellow and black - and of bumble bees - yellow and black. It's like a moving, chirping, buzzing work of art. In the picture below, there are actually four or five birds but all but two are hiding.





I hope you spy some sunflowers in this beautiful month! Andrew and I planted most of these in little cups last spring. We had fun watching how quickly they germinated and grew. Now it's fun to think that these towers of flower started out on our kitchen table!

#### **Andrew's orientation day at preschool [Video] (2009-09-08 12:18)**

Andrew had a 15 minute orientation at his preschool today. He rode his bike to school, where he met his new teachers, Gail and Debbie. He'll be in the same classroom where he was in Sue and Emily's classroom last year. There are a handful of children in his class that he knows, and he's really excited about the whole thing!

Here's a quick video of the budderoo as he heads off.

[flickr video=3901416430]

#### **Raspberry cake (2009-09-09 07:27)**

When Maretta and Kyle were visiting last weekend, we took an outing to Blue Skies Farm. I had miss-read their website and didn't realize that they were actually closed on Saturday (they sell at the Farmer's Market that morning). However, the owners were amazingly sweet, and they let us go ahead and roam the fields and pick what was available. We came home with three brimming pints of berries.





That afternoon, Maretta and I made a raspberry cake from her new William Sonoma cake cookbook. We made a genoise cake with a raspberry and whipping cream filling. It was good.

Cooking and spending time with my sister was even better than the cake, though. Thanks for coming down to visit, guys!



### **First day of preschool and first full day of daycare (2009-09-09 08:38)**

Sylvia and Andrew both have exciting days today. Maybe the one who is the most excited is me!

Andrew's at preschool for his first day today. It's a shortened day (only 2 hours), but I waved goodbye to him at the classroom door and watched him head in to play with his new teachers and classmates. He was wearing a slightly stained shirt along with shamrock socks (that would probably fit Sylvia) and his flip flops. Flip flops and socks are an odd combo. He wouldn't budge. Other kids came in looking quite dapper and "first day of schoolish." Andrew's not one to let the prevailing winds of decorum guide his fashion sense. Heck, he still wears his undies backwards to be silly! At least he mostly now wears his shirts and pants forwards!

Sylvia is at Donna's (an in-home daycare) for her first full day today. She's been going to Donna's on Wednesday mornings since March, and today (and Wednesdays in the future) she will stay all the way until 4pm. Yayyy! I think she'll do well. She waved and talked to me through the window as I left. She's a sweet girl.



I'm the new treasurer on the Monona Grove Nursery School's board of directors, and that's taken up quite a bit of time. I've been going through paperwork, getting signed up with the banks, learning Quickbooks, meeting with people to go over procedures, and writing lots of checks.

Now I feel like I have two jobs - photography and treasurer - to keep me busy with any free time that comes my way!

Hope your day is a good one! I'll look forward to hearing how Andrew likes his new class!

### **Finger painting! (2009-09-09 11:36)**

For those of you who are stressed after getting back to work after our long Labor Day weekend, I suggest finger painting!





There's nothing like mushing paint between your fingers.







Sylvia likes all the photographic attention. Andrew on the other hand...not such a fan. In fact, the phrase, "MOM! Stop taking my picture!" came out loud and clear. But he was OK with me photographing his paper.







You can purchase finger paints at most stores. Have fun!

### **Andrew is reading! [video] (2009-09-10 11:46)**

Last winter and spring, Andrew was smitten...obsessed one might even say...with learning his letters. He spent lots of time writing letters and copying words on his easel. He went through workbooks at a furious pace. Then over the summer, the passion faded, and nary a letter has been seen. It's all fine with me! Whatever interests a youngster at the moment is a good thing to explore.



While he hasn't been writing, Andrew has been working on reading. When we were at Carleton for my 10th reunion in June, we picked up a book by Mo Willems called Are You Ready to Play Outside?

Thanks to my friend Mandee for introducing me to the world of Mo Willems, we are now good friends with Knuffle Bunny and the Pigeon. The Elephant and Piggy books are a series of early reader book, and Andrew loves them. He devours them. And I think they're pretty great too.

It's really amazing for me to watch Andrew's reading skills growing as he learns more vocabulary and increases his confidence.

Here's a video I took of Andrew a couple weeks ago. We're in the library parking lot. Andrew wanted to start reading a book right away (but he wanted me there to help when he gets stuck. Sometimes he gets a little panicky when he gets stuck on a word). So I video taped him. Enjoy!

[flickr video=3907675256]

### **Sometimes there is unhappiness (2009-09-11 12:39)**

I love staying home full-time with the kids. We have so much fun together. I love the quietness of it, the times we have for reading and painting and making meals. I love to go on outings, meet up with friends, play in the yard for hours and hours.

I'm discovering that I am a mom who needs activity. Even if the activity is just being outdoors and swinging or bike riding or chatting with neighbors (we do a lot of that!). In contrast, I don't do so well just hanging out. Last weekend, I was the parent who got up with the kids in the mornings. On Monday morning, Bryan noted that we'd had a feast for breakfast every morning: crepes on Saturday, pancakes on Sunday, and waffles on Monday. All included eggs and sausage and juice and coffee. I told him that it was easier for me to have a project to do with the kids when we're up early together. "As opposed to just playing with them?" he replied.

He's right. If we're just playing in the sun room, I get bored really fast. I try to read a magazine or clean or pull out the laptop. I'm not sure why. I'm happy to read the kids books for long periods or play a game or color on the easel or play a make-believe game. Andrew and Sylvie both like helping me cook, and they have fun cracking eggs, measuring milk, and whisking ingredients. But if the kids are just hanging out, doing their thing, I don't really have the patience...actually the interest...in staying tuned in. Oh, and they love it when I just watch them play. Bryan's mom is an expert at that. She loves watching kids play and do their thing. Bryan seems pretty good at it too. Ahh well, we all have our strengths!

So that's something that's been on my mind, and I thought I'd share. Another thing on my mind is that we have a fair amount of Sylvia-unhappiness in our household. That girl is amazing. I love her over the moon. She has so much energy and spirit and spunk. When we go to restaurants, she greets all the other patrons with waves and "HI!!!" and dimples galore. When she laughs (especially when Andrew makes her laugh), it's heart-warming enough to make a statue crack a smile.

She also has passion and sadness. We visited Sarah and baby Charlie today. They were coming home from their morning stroller ride. It made me think, "What a lovely daily ritual! A stroller ride. Why don't we do regular stroller rides?" The reason, I quickly remembered, is that from the time it was warm enough to take Sylvia on her earliest walks and stroller rides, she has gone on only a small number fully happy. Invariably, the first half is good and the second half involves some screaming. At least a third of the walk she needs to be carried (if she was in the stroller) or held (if she was in a carrier) as she screams and flails. The girl doesn't like to be confined.



Sometimes I think I should just do things more frequently or consistently with her. If we took a walk every morning at the same time to the same place, maybe that would be better. It isn't. Or if it is, Andrew doesn't want to go and he ends up being the one crying and needing to be carried.

Sylvia also tends to fuss or cry most times we drive in the car. It's not like when she was little and screamed the whole ride. That got better when she was around six months. It's that she didn't want to get in her car seat in the first place or she wants something Andrew has or she finished her snack and wants more. For the most part, I can talk her down or cajole her into being calm, but keeping her happy in the car is an active process. She doesn't get calmed by music or audio books. She sometimes likes to look at books or play with dolls, but then she drops them and I can't reach them and that's a big problem.

We had lunch with Bryan today. His office is on the other side of town, and Sylvia cried all the way home. She was saying, "Wa." And I have no idea what she wanted. She got her arms out her car seat in her tantrum. I guess it all makes me appreciate quiet drives across town when I get them.

All this is to say that if I one day have a grandchild I'd like to remember that things as a parent are sometimes kind of rough. And the rough parts can be mixed in, part and parcel with the sweet, darling, wonderful parts. I'm already finding that I forget things about parenting. I kind of forget what it was like to wake up many times in the night or to have a sick tiny baby. Just like with child birth, the hard parts kind of fade into amnesia and the glowing parts stay crystal clear in my mind. So I write this down not to complain, not even because today is particularly harder than any other day or week, but just to keep it real.

### **Stay-at-home date (2009-09-12 11:41)**

Last night, Bryan and I had such a fun evening together. I was totally worn out after we put the kids to bed, but instead of curling up with a book or hopping on the laptop, Bryan and I talked about parenting for a while. I'd mentioned that I was in the mood for a big piece of chocolate cake with chocolate butter-cream frosting. Instead of that, Bryan suggested that we make a batch of cookies together.



We made lemon sugar cookies (recipe and the Penzey's dehydrated lemon peel) from Maretta. Bryan and I almost never...REALLY almost never cook or bake together, so this was a lot of fun. And oh, my, that butter-rich batter was yummy! Here's a blog post describing the cookies, showing scrumptious pictures, and giving the recipe.



After our cookie-baking, we sat down and played a game of canasta. It's been years since we played canasta. It used to be our favorite game. On our honeymoon in Japan, we played it obsessively. Then it got where Bryan beat me soundly every time and we (I) decided that we needed a break from Canasta to maintain marital harmony. So it was fun to play again!

An evening having fun with my sweetie was the perfect way to start the weekend. Hope your weekend is off to a good start too!

**Read-aloud - and new flowers (2009-09-12 12:16)**

Here's our read-aloud of the week. I am loving reading Andrew chapter books!



PS. If you can't see the picture for some reason, it's Stuart Little.

In other news, my clematis on the front porch is just breaking into bloom. It's really grown big this year. Look at how much of the porch it covers!



The first of the buds just opened last night.



I just checked, and it looks like last year they bloomed on the same weekend!

Picture from '08



**Somersaulting Andrew (2009-09-13 11:42)**



Andrew (and Sylvia too) are pretty agile, active, coordinated kids. Andrew has recently been playing a game where he does a running somersault onto the air mattress in the back yard. For your viewing pleasure, here's his act:



running..



The jump...



Flipping!





Tucking!



Landing!



Done. Again!



If that wasn't enough for you, I've got another sequence in the gallery!

Sylvia's block tower (2009-09-13 18:53)



In general, Sylvia doesn't spend a lot of time playing with blocks. It's just not one of her favorite play activities. So I was surprised and impressed yesterday when I came into the room and saw that she had built a tall tower. I pulled out my camera, and she was quite happy to pose for me with her creation.



Kissing the tower...







What a cutie! She really amazes me with her fine-motor skills. You should watch her wield a fork and spoon (when she's not smearing her food)!

#### **Andrew's many faces (2009-09-14 08:59)**

Andrew, as a general rule, does not like me to take photographs of him. And, in general, he is pretty adamant about that sentiment. But the other day (when I was taking pictures of Sylvia's tower), he decided he wanted some pictures of his various silly faces. He did this back in February with Bryan. The results make me smile.

Goofy:





Excited...



Sad...



Scared...



And then, one photo Andrew took... (as I held my hands under the camera lest he dropped it!)



I hope you feel many of the first two emotions today!

### **An open letter (2009-09-14 10:29)**

To all those with whom I communicate via email:

I apologize for my regular lack of response to your kind notes.

I've just spent the last two hours going through hundreds of old emails (I'm actually writing this post at 12:30am), and it's embarrassing...simply embarrassing...how many informative, questioning, consoling, interesting emails have gone unanswered.

My only consolation for you is that you're in good company.

Yikes.

Althea

### **Fun times at the playground (2009-09-15 07:00)**

This past weekend was just stunningly beautiful. The last few weeks have been incredible. Dry, warm, blue-skies, lots of flowers...we're just soaking it all in.



On Saturday, we took a family walk to our neighborhood park (which we call the Yellow Slide Park, for obvious reasons). Andrew rode his bike while Sylvia happily went along in the stroller. The oak trees have been dropping their acorns, so I hunted around for acorns and the kids had a blast playing on all the equipment. I'm going to post some pics below, but there's lots more from that outing in the gallery!



I love those pictures of the kids together. I get so few of them when they're actually in the same frame!

Sylvia was having fun walking on the balance beam (with Daddy's help).







There was swinging silliness...



And note Sylvia's miss-matched shoes. She got help getting dressed from her brother...



She loves to spin!!



Andrew sure does love his little sister!



It's just so much fun to trail kids around a playground with a camera! More pics are available [here](#).)



Wordless Wednesday (2009-09-16 07:24)







Photo by undoneclothing <http://www.flickr.com/photos/undoneclothing/>

Finances are a topic that just isn't talked about much in our society. It's generally considered a very private, personal thing. Even with my good friends - we don't often have conversations about money. I understand the reasons why, but I also think that being more open to talking about money would benefit our society in general. With all the people drowning in debt or experiencing significant stress because of hidden money woes, I think smart money talk would be helpful.

I specifically think that it's helpful to me to hear about how families make their finances work. In addition to filling my mind with thoughts of all the neat things I could do or make or buy, I like to see what people don't do. What kinds of things do families forgo or made-do with so they can live within their means?

Bryan and I have been taking a hard look at our finances, and what we're seeing shows us that we need to take a new look at our family's money management. Bryan has a good job. We have nice income flow. We've got health insurance. Those are very good things. But for at least the last year or so, our expenses are consistently outstripping our income. It's a trickle, a steady trickle. And it's not sustainable.

So over the next days and weeks and months, we're going to sit down and budget. I've budgeted before, but



we have always just spent money by feel. Despite all the extensive spreadsheets and accounting systems that I've obsessed over in the past, we've never actually lived by a pre-determined budget. That's changing this week.

We use Mint.com to organize our finances. It's a great (free!) system where you enter all you bank accounts, credit cards, loans, investments, etc. and you can look and track them all in the same place. It also helps you budget and you can compare what you're spending to what others in different cities and states are spending. It's been a good tool.

To help us really get a handle on expenses, I'm thinking about using Simple Mom's envelope system. I never, ever, ever use cash, but if we use this system, we'll withdraw cash from our bank account at the beginning of the month, put it in envelopes for various expenses, and then we'll have that as the money we use for the month. Seems like it will certainly help us become more aware of times when we use up our funds in different budget categories!

Simple Mom has a whole section of her website on money management. I don't subscribe to everything she says, but I do think that she has lots of good ideas. I'd love to stop losing money and to build up a six-month emergency fund.

I'm thinking about writing more about this topic as we move forward. For one, I hope to be encouraging to others who are trying to stay financially soluble, and for two, I'm hoping that some of my readers might have thoughts or suggestions or resources to share. Let me know what you think!

#### **First apple orchard outing of the season (2009-09-17 07:18)**



We took our first outing to the Door Creek apple orchard on Sunday afternoon. Pictures are in the gallery. This past month has been full of simply perfect weather. It's been dry, warm, and sunny. Perfect for being outside.

I'll bet farmers would enjoy a bit of rain, but from my perspective, it's ideal.



Our apple orchard outing was short...we zipped over, picked some Earliblaze (for a pie) some Courtlands (for apple sauce), and then we purchased a pre-picked bag of Honeycrisps. Andrew wasn't interested in going down to the pond or heading up the hill to visit the sheep, so we then zipped on back home. In and out with no fussing:) Now we're sipping on delicious apple cider and munching lots of apples. I bet we'll need to go back soon!



PS. Lisa, we'd love to go out to the orchard with you and Bubs sometime. Maybe next weekend??





Ahh, fall. I do love the fruits of autumn!

### **What a response! (2009-09-18 01:25)**

I'd just like to send a big thanks to everyone who responded to my first post on money management. It feels great to have a community of friends and family chiming in, and it's neat to see all the different ways that families make their finances work. Thanks for sharing all your ideas and suggestions and support!

I think that writing out some of my thoughts about budgeting and money management should be fun. In fact, my next post is already in the works.

Tonight, I'm working on the budget for Andrew's preschool (I'm just getting started as the treasurer...it seems like all my free time these days I'm thinking about money!). In that context, I was just thinking about how budgets are great because they really help define the priorities for an organization. Like Jessica's comment (or actually Mitch's comment on my last post), budgets aren't about limiting so much as they are about purposefully allocating.

Well, in my case, maybe they're mostly about limiting, but I'm going to try to think of it positively! Thanks for joining me as I meander forward, through this topic.

## What is important? (2009-09-18 07:30)

x

Illustrations by Garth Williams (he also did the Little House books)

Andrew and I finished reading *Stuart Little* this afternoon. For those of you who haven't read this great book or who don't remember the plot, the book ends with Stuart (a mouse) heading north to search for his missing friend, a lovely brown bird named Margalo.

As we turned the last page, there's a picture of Stuart driving north in his cute little car, and the last line is, "But the sky was bright, and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction."

Andrew paused and said, "What happens then??" I told him that since the book ended, we'd have to write his own ending. So we pulled out a pad of paper, and he wrote out, "Stuart finds Margalo." So sweet. Such a wonderfully sweet boy!

Earlier in the book, we ran across a line that had been one my mom quoted. I read it out loud to Andrew a couple times, and I thought I'd share it with you! In this chapter, Stuart (a mouse, remember) has taken on the job of substitute teaching a class of school children.

Everyone's eyes lit up with excitement to see such a small and good-looking teacher, so appropriately dressed.

After some humorous preliminaries, they get down to business. Stuart announces that the world gets into a lot of trouble because it has no chairman.

"I would like to be Chairman of the world myself."

"You're too small," said Mary Bendix.

"Oh, fish feathers," said Stuart. "Size has nothing to do with it. It's temperament and ability that count. The Chairman has to have ability and he must know what's important. How many of you know what's important?"

Up went all the hands

"Very good," said Stuart . . . "Henry Rackmeyer, you tell us what is important."

"A shaft of sunlight at the end of a dark afternoon, a note in music, and the way the back of a baby's neck smells if its mother keeps it tidy," answered Henry.

"Correct," said Stuart. "Those are the important things. You forgot one thing though. Mary Bendix, what did Henry Rackmeyer forget?"

"He forgot ice cream with chocolate sauce on it," said Mary quickly.



"Exactly," said Stuart. "Ice cream is important."

Mom often quoted E.B. White as saying that one of the most important things in life is the way a baby's neck smells if its mother keeps it tidy. I agree.

### **Budget item one: housing (2009-09-18 14:40)**

As Bryan and I have been looking at our expenses, I've been starting big and working my way down. If you have the interest and patience, I think I'll proceed with this money management topic (see my first post here) by sharing some thoughts about each of our major expense categories. So jump in, and hang on!!

(I'm pulling my stats from Mint.com, which I've been using to analyze our spending over the last year.)

The first expense, the biggest one (27 % of our annual expenses), is housing.



That's Andrew when he was just a little pumpkin!



This summer, we re-financed our home from a 30-year 5.6 % fixed mortgage to a 15-year 4.5 % fixed mortgage. We're feeling pretty positive about the switch. In the past, we were paying double monthly mortgage payments in order to eat away a little at our principle (those first 10-years of a 30-year mortgage are almost entirely interest). We liked the fact that we could decrease the amount we were paying if the situation warranted.

However, with the low interest rates, we decided that re-financing with a 15-year mortgage would be a better bet because we'd be paying so much less to the bank and so much more to our own equity.

I like our house. I like that it's not too big (we think it's about 1200 sq. feet). It fits our family well and (other than a kinda nasty basement) has good bones, new windows and nice details (I love our hardwood floors, kitchen, and sunroom!). So mortgage payments are a fixed, non-optional cost.



In the "housing" category, I also have a few sub-categories that contain more discretionary spending. These include Home Services (we got the carpet and a sofa steam cleaned last spring), Furnishings (I purchased some new blinds for our bedroom), Lawn and Garden ( \$200 spent on flowers and plants for our yard this past year), Home Insurance (which I re-bid last spring and got a less expensive policy), and Home Improvement ( \$325 spent at Ace Hardware and Menards for things like re-surfacing the driveway, tools, a new dehumidifier for the basement, etc.).



Those expenses (other than Home Insurance) are optional. Looking forward six months (that's to mid-April!), I can curb expenses by not purchasing a mum for the garden this fall and by cutting out or limiting my spring plant purchases. I sometimes buy pumpkins, gourds, and corn stalks to decorate the porch for halloween, but perhaps this year I'll limit it to a few pumpkins. Simplify:)



Also, we should limit our trips to Menards and Ace to the essentials (I always buy more than I intend when I go in those stores!). We need to purchase things like water softener salt and solar salt (in the winter), and there's

sometimes a shovel that needs replacing, but for the most part, we can probably make-do!

I'll continue to hold-off on re-painting our bedroom (that wasn't a big priority anyway!), and next time we need to clean furniture or rugs, I'll think about renting the machine rather than paying someone to come in. Either way would cost \$ \$, but I'll be renting the machine is cheaper.

I'm guessing that if I reign in spending over the next six months, I can probably knock \$300- \$400 off this category.

When I compared our expenses in the housing category to the average USA or Wisconsin, it looks like we spend far over the average on the rent/mortgage category but far less than the average on all the other home services and expenses. From my perspective, that's probably a good thing.

OK, so I think we've got the housing category covered. Next is a meaty one...food!

So how about you? How do you feel about your home expenses? Any thoughts, suggestions, or tips? Does your house feel like a home? I'm all ears!

### **Sleep, baby, sleep (2009-09-19 07:01)**

I love Sylvia's bedtime routine these days. She's so adorable and communicative, and her routine is a lot of fun.

Starting at about 6:40, we give her a bath. She loves pouring water and splashing and dumping a cup over her head. She's often enjoying using the potty before bed.

Then there's a bit of a struggle while she declares that she'd rather not get her pajamas on.

Then we say goodnight to everyone with hugs.



After that, we read some books. Her favorites right now are *The Napping House* by Don and Audrey Wood and the golden book *Baby Dear* by Esther and Eloise Wilkins. I loved *Baby Dear* as a kid (my mom and Bryan's mom did too!) and it's fun that Sylvia is enjoying it as well.

Before our last book, I say, "One more story. And then..." And Sylvia replies, "Nigh nigh."

I hold her to my chest, and I sing the song I most like to sing to her, *Sleep, Baby, Sleep*.

Sleep, baby, sleep  
Your father tends the sheep  
Your mother shakes the dreamland tree  
And from it fall sweet dreams for thee  
Sleep, baby, sleep  
Sleep, baby, sleep

Sleep, baby, sleep  
Our cottage vale is deep  
The little lamb is on the green  
With snowy fleece so soft and clean  
Sleep, baby, sleep  
Sleep, baby, sleep

Sleep, baby, sleep,  
Down where the woodbines creep  
Be always like the lamb so mild  
A kind, and sweet, and gentle child

Sleep, baby, sleep  
Sleep, baby, sleep

Then I lay her down, she rolls over, takes up her poodle and paci, and goes to sleep.

It's a good routine, and I've been happy to be part of it!

**Photography blog post: Adorable kiddo alert (2009-09-20 08:00)**

I'm planning to start posting on my photography blog as I do photo sessions. I had to overcome a few technical hurdles first, and while I don't have my systems running seamlessly yet, I think I'm to a point where I'll be able to give my clients a sneak-peak of their pictures as I'm editing them.

So if you're curious, here's a sneak peak. What a beautiful day! What a wonderful family! More are available over at [altheadotzourphotography.com/blog](http://altheadotzourphotography.com/blog)





**Opportunity to support Andrew's preschool! (2009-09-21 07:30)**

Andrew goes to a simply wonderful preschool. It's a non-profit, parent cooperative, and it's very play-oriented and low-key and loving. Since school started, Andrew's been riding his bike to school (since it's a block from our house!), and he's once again LOVING it.

I think Monona Grove Nursery School is so great that I joined the board of directors this summer. Being the treasurer has been a lot of work, but it feels so rewarding to be helping to run a school that is doing so many great things for so many kids.

As a not-for-profit organization, the school relies on fund-raisers as well as student tuition to make ends meet. Would you, lovely reader, consider supporting this great organization either with a donation of \$10 (or more!) or with a purchase of one of several tasty items? I'd really appreciate it!

Information of the sale items are below. Or if you prefer to donate with a check that's perfect too! The last day to submit your order is September 30.



Oh, and by the way, those butter braids are goooooood. We just pulled our last one out of the freezer a few weeks ago, and boy, what a great weekend-morning treat!

**X Butter Braids Frozen Pastries**

Butter Braid is a 22 oz. Frozen Pastry dough. When baked, it produces a homemade tasting breakfast entree or dessert.

It needs to rise 8-12 hours (rise till double in size). Bake for 20-25 minutes to make a delicious special pastry!

\$11 each

Flavors to choose from:

apple, Bavarian creme, blueberry/cream cheese, caramel rolls (9 count), cherry, cinnamon, cream cheese, raspberry

If you want some of these in your freezer, please let me know how many of each flavor you would like.

**Party Time cookie dough**

MMmmm...cookie dough... I like the idea of having a three-pound tub of cookie dough in my fridge:)

Scoop the dough onto a cookie sheet and bake-it's just that easy.

Each tub makes 96 half-ounce cookies. The dough lasts six months in the freezer or 3 mo in the fridge.

\$14 each

Flavors to choose from:

chunky chocolate chip, made with M &M's, peanut butter, oatmeal raisin, sugar, monster (Peanut butter and oatmeal base with chocolate chips, peanut butter chips, and candy-coated chocolate pieces), triple chocolate, snickerdoodle, white chocolate macadamia nut, peanut butter with chocolate chunks, made with Heath English toffee,

Also, for \$14, you can order two-dozen cinnamon rolls

To order the cookie dough, please let me know how many tubs of each flavor you would like.

**Colored sugar cookie dough**

Making creative sugar cookies has never been easier. This made-from-scratch dough allows you to play and create your own cookies in rainbow colors. Create flowers, animals, words, or anything you can imagine. Produced in the heartland, using only the finest ingredients. Comes in blue, green, red, and yellow.

\$14 for four 14 ounce tubs (total weight is 3.5 pounds)

If this sounds like fun, please let me know how many orders you would like (each order includes four colors of cookie dough).

Your last day to order is Wednesday, September 30. Thanks so much for helping to support Andrew's wonderful preschool.

The orders are being delivered on Thursday, November 12th. Checks for products should be made out to me (I'm supposed to submit one check for the entire order). Checks written as a donation to the preschool can be made out to Monona Grove Nursery School.

THANKS!

### Food matters (2009-09-22 06:50)



Photo by <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wiedmaier/>

Hi! Welcome to my third installment in my series on money management. (See post one and post two:housing here!) In an effort to spend a bit less and save a bit more, I'm taking a look at my family's expenses. I started big, and I'm working my way down. However, our second biggest expense - Food - is such a big topic, I think I have the pieces of several posts floating around in my head.

First off, the details. According to the analysis of Mint.com, our family around 20 % of our money on food. I've done some looking around, and it looks like the average American family spends 5-10 % of their income on

food...roughly half of that spent on groceries and half spent dining out. So we spend at least twice the average. That's a lot!

Granted, our Food category is pretty inclusive. At the grocery store, we also purchase things like laundry detergent, diapers, light bulbs, Kleenex and toiletries, so those items are all lumped in with our grocery store purchases. Even so, we spend an average of \$160 each week on groceries. Is this crazy? How much does your family spend?



Isn't this great! Felt food by buggabugs on Etsy

Here's the rest of the picture. As a family, we spend an average of \$6/day eating out. We spend about \$4/week at coffee shops (this also includes ice cream at JavaCat!). Over the last year, we paid \$2,400 on food outside of the home. Geesh! It felt like we were being judicious in our choices about eating out, but that seems like a lot of money!

As we look for ways to curb spending, our Food category seems like a critical one to examine since it comprises such a big chunk of our overall expenses. We love our food, and for us, the food we eat has a lot to do with our values and the way we want to nourish our family and our world.



I got a master's degree in Natural Resource Policy and Behavior. As an undergraduate at Carleton, I took classes in sustainable agriculture. In my work at Gathering Waters, I did some work with the Federal Farm Bill. Throughout these experiences, I've read and thought and talked extensively about conventional and more sustainable farming practices.

I've looked at the history and the current status of the US's farm policy, and I'm acutely aware of how farm subsidies, school lunch programs, food-stamp programs, and even the food pyramid have in many cases lost the concept of feeding people real, fresh food that's good for our bodies and our communities. I've seen how difficult it is for people to change behaviors. Perhaps most importantly, I've learned in my studies that since we live in a capitalist society, if we want things to change, we need to vote with our money. I feel passionately about that. No matter who I elect into office or what education programs I help create, the thing that matters the most is, collectively, the companies we support with our daily dollars.



Image from the AP

I want to see a shift away from conglomerate farms. I want farmers to earn a living wage. I want farmers to use good, healthy farming practices. I want lots of products offered in grocery stores that don't contain trans-fat or high-fructose corn syrup or long lists of words I can't pronounce. I want to enjoy food that was raised or grown right nearby so I'm not encouraging so much long-distance transport of food and so I can support local farms. I want my kids to know and expect their food to be real, healthy, and tasty. To achieve those goals, I believe that I need to be a conscientious consumer.



Photo by <http://www.flickr.com/photos/latitudes/>

Now I want to step back for a moment and give a disclaimer. What I'm hoping to do in this post is to share some of my family's values, which are then shaping the decisions we are making about how to spend our money. We've come to these values over the course of many years, and they are personal and evolving. I think everyone has the right to express their own values - be they political, religious, or of a foodie nature. I just hope that no one read any judgmental tone in any of this, as none is intended.

x

So back to being a conscientious consumer... Unfortunately, in general, I've found that purchasing food and products that promote the values I hold dear means I'm paying a premium. But I'm willing to do it! Since the time I was a young girl in the 1980s and learned about dolphin-safe tuna, I've felt that it's worthwhile to spend a few extra cents to purchase products that are doing good.

Ten years ago, Bryan and I bought all conventionally-produced groceries. We now spend maybe half of our grocery budget on what I'll call non-traditional food items...things are either organic or local or higher quality. In my next post, I'm going to take a look at some of those items (milk, eggs, diapers, coffee) and look at our budget implications of spending our money this way.

My hope is that if we have to change some of our spending patterns, we can find strategic areas to cut so we can continue to live by our values while saving some money in the near-term. Let me know what you think about all this! How much does your family spend on groceries every week? Are there more expensive things you buy that think are really worth while? What grocery items are most important to you?

I look forward to hearing what you have to say!



### **Mad Men (2009-09-23 14:42)**

Bryan and I started watching the series Mad Men this week on Netflix. We love it! It's a TV show about the advertising world on Madison Avenue in the 1960s. The costumes and sets are wonderful, the dialogue is sharp and fast, and I care about the characters...even as they (already in the third episode of the first season) are on fast-tracks to destroy themselves.

x

Other favorite shows of ours include Six Feet Under, the first few seasons of Alias, The 4400, Dead Like Me, Battlestar Galactica, Deadwood, Firefly, Lost, Rescue Me, and Sex in the City.

At some point, we may watch The Wire, Rome, and that one about the capitol...West Wing. Any recommendations from you?

### **What our children teach us (2009-09-24 07:38)**

x I haven't purchased that many books on child rearing...I check out lots from the library, but I've only bought a select few. In some cases I buy them because I think I'll want to refer back to them many times, or in this case, because they're so wonderful that I know I'll want to lend them to friends and to sip their goodness again and again.

Yesterday, I pulled from my shelf the book Mitten Strings for God: Reflections for Mothers in a Hurry by Katrina Kennison. For my many secular friends, don't fear, there's no religious overtones:) One of the book's reviews says, "Inspirational and life-affirming, it offers reminders of what is of lasting value, such as grace, love, tranquility." I agree.

This afternoon, I flipped the book open and found myself reading the following passage. It rang true, so I thought I'd share.

The fact is I've learned an enormous amount from both my children. Different lessons from two very different temperaments, all of them valuable. But it is true that Jack—forty-two pounds of spirit, vulnerability, curiosity, and sheer life force—has been my most demanding teacher, exposing all my weaknesses and requiring me to develop even greater fortitude. In his passionate, head-long rush into life, he has shown me exactly where my rope ends, where my patience runs out, where my edges fray, where my own outer limits really are. He taught me that in order to be an effective and loving disciplinarian, I must first be able to control myself.

Sylvia's, er, outbursts don't often make me lose my temper. More often I'm like a deer in headlights, carrying her around or sitting near her with a blank expression on my face and no ideas of what to do to make the situation better. Her passions don't tend to ignite my own, but they do make me lose my mind a bit.

A couple days ago, during our first down-pouring rain of the fall, Sylvia threw her...I don't know...fourth tantrum of the morning, and I really kind of lost it. We were walking home from Andrew's preschool. I plunked her in the soaking stroller, put her rain cover on, and walked her home. She screamed, and I swore under my breath the whole way. It was a low point. As I was stomping home through the pouring rain with a leaky umbrella, I remember thinking that all of us have had unpleasant co-workers that make us want to change jobs. It was too bad that mine was my own child.

But we got home, and I retrieved her poodle and paci (who have the power to soothe her when nothing else can). Then I picked up my sweet, wet, shaky girl, and she put her little arms around her contrite, wet, shaky mom, and both of us held each other until we felt better. Then we held each other a lot longer. She's a wonderful baby, an adorable kid. And she's making me a stronger person. Look out world, here she comes!



**Dinosaur train (2009-09-25 09:03)**



It's a quiet Friday morning here in the Dotzour home. Bryan made me coffee, and I'm finishing up my cup of latte while Andrew is watching a little PBS. We've had morning activities every day this week, so today we're taking it slow.

Andrew's come up with the idea that on Fridays we'll go to Bryan's office and have lunch with him, so we're going to start that tradition today.

Sylvia, who has no interest in the television, is bringing me dollies to put to "nigh nigh." That's great with me. Pediatricians recommend no television before age two.



Sid the Science Kid and his gang

Our favorite PBS shows are Sesame Street, Sid the Science Kid, and Super Why. Sid the Science Kid is a cute show about a kid who loves learning about how the world works. He makes lots of hypotheses and does experiments. Good stuff! Andrew loves Super Why...a show that helps teach kids things from letter recognition to reading easy words to rhyming to reading and spelling. It's perfectly suited to Andrew's current interest (obsession) with beginning reading. Although, come to think of it, we haven't seen either of these shows most of the summer.

This morning we turned on the television set a bit before Sesame Street started, and we saw a new show called Dinosaur Train. It made me smile and laugh enough that I thought I'd share it with you. We've been watching (sigh) The Land Before Time VIII recently, and while there's nothing wrong with it, I'm not really a fan. Dinosaur Train was particularly fun because it dealt with similar themes about friendship and life-lessons, but it was much nerdier and made me laugh.



The show follows a young T. rex who is best friends with a (not really a dino) Pteranodon and is being raised by her family. The two of them have silly adventures, and they talk a lot about what different dinos ate and what that meant about how they lived. Sort of paleontology for four-year-olds. One thing I thought was cool was that there's a train that runs through several time tunnels from the Cretaceous to the Triassic and Jurassic periods. They take the train to the different periods to meet new dinosaurs and to learn about them.

Here's an article on the show for those who are interested in finding out more.

Now, off to our Friday! Hope yours is a good one!



### **Terry's trip (2009-09-26 08:14)**

Terry is going to return back home from a month-long trip on the 29th. He's been exploring Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Quebec City on a Haller-esque (manic, "We're not here to have fun! We're here to see and do as much as humanly possible!") driving trip. You can read his blog and see some of his lovely pictures here.

A couple days ago, Terry sent me the following note. It made me smile, so I thought I'd share.

I am staying in perhaps the most mind-boggling hotel I have ever stayed in. Calling it a "hotel" is something of a misnomer – it is a gilded age 110-room Vanderbilt mansion, and I am staying in a gorgeous room. It is called Shelburne Farms, near Burlington Vermont. It is an interesting blend of Terry (ultra posh, gorgeous in every respect) with Althea (nonprofit devoted to environmental education and sustainability, nice).

**Pumpkin patch (trip #1) (2009-09-27 16:49)**

It was a stunningly beautiful September day today. Sylvia and I headed out for a little girl-time late this morning, and we ended up joining up with Sarah, Wes, and Charlie for a trip to the pumpkin patch. I've never been to Eplegaarden on a weekend, and it was (I think it's fair to say) a madhouse. Lines and crowds galore! And also lots of pumpkins, apples, berries, a hay ride, a spook house, etc, etc, etc.

Sarah, Wes, and I had lots of fun watching our one-year-olds explore the pumpkin patch. Photos are in the gallery. A few sweet samples can also be found below. Hooray for autumn!









Andrew's preschool is taking a field trip to this farm next week, so we'll be back!

### **ZAP! uh, new microwave time (2009-09-28 13:45)**

Last night I attempted to use the microwave to melt some butter for the corn bread batter. Mmm corn bread and chili on a windy, fall evening.

Instead of melting my butter, the microwave made a spooky crackling zap noise. Then it appeared to work - lights on, turn-table rotating - but after a minute, the butter was still cold. This morning I tried it again and there was a loud electrical snapping noise. Still no food-warming. I called a repair shop, and they said it was probably the magnetron\*. She said repairing it costs about \$300. Hmmm, the replacement microwaves I looked up online looked to be about \$300.

Looks like our Home Improvement budget item is going to see a bit of use!

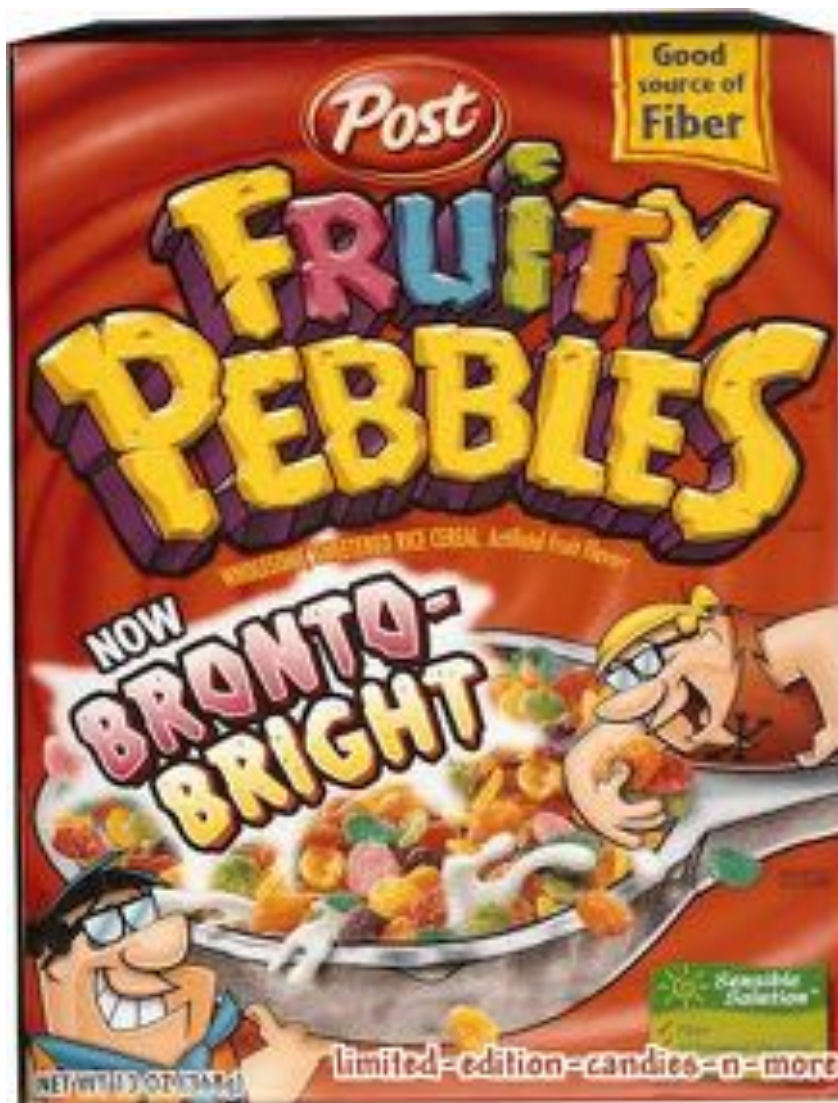
Definition: A microwave tube in which electrons generated from a heated cathode are affected by magnetic and electric fields in such a way as to produce microwave radiation used in radar and in microwave ovens. (from Answers.com)

**Hazard: Fruity Pebbles ahead (2009-09-29 23:56)**

I'd like to paint a picture for you.

Imagine for a moment that you're in the grocery store, walking down the cereal aisle, contemplating your breakfast selection. As you meander along, you are startled to see in front of you, on the ground, body curled tightly around a box of cereal, a little boy. He's maybe four years old. Cute, with blond, curly hair. He's obviously very committed to this cereal box. The boy's mother seems to be less committed to this cereal box and appears to be trying to reason with him from nearby. You can see immediately that this isn't going anywhere fast. So you give the mom a quick smile, steer around the boy-on-the ground, and continue on your way.

I didn't realize the potential humor in this situation until I retold it to Bryan this evening. Now I wish I'd pulled out my camera and snapped a few pictures.



As we were picking up our O's and granola at Woodman's today, Andrew scooted away and came back clutching a box of Fruity Pebbles to his chest. His eyes were big and bright. He. Wanted. Them.

I told him that they did indeed look cool, but that we weren't getting them.

Andrew clutched them closer to his breast and declared his adoration, his NEED for this cereal.

I told him to put the box back because it was under no circumstances coming home with us.

Andrew calmly lay down on the ground and curled his body around the box in the fetal position.

I explained to Andrew-on-the-ground that the cereal he had picked wasn't healthy and wouldn't help him grow big and strong and that we don't bring un-healthy foods into our home (note to self: chocolate chips are healthy).

The Andrew/cereal box shape on the floor didn't move. People navigated their shopping carts around him.

I told him that I'd come back here another time when Sylvie wasn't here (about to lose her patience), and we'd find a special cereal that he thought was fun and that I thought was acceptable.

I sensed a slight loosening of his grip on the box.

I explained that the reason he wanted the cereal so much was because the box was a commercial and (as he knows) commercials are designed to make you want things. "Boy, that cartoon and those bright colors on that cereal box sure did work well at making you want that cereal. It's crazy how effective commercials can be, isn't it, Andrew!"

He moved the cereal from his stomach and stretched out on the floor with it under his head like a beloved pillow.

Then, and this is a demonstration of a major difference between four-year-old Andrew and one-year-old Sylvia, he let me take the cereal box out from under his head, he kind of sadly stood up, and within a few moments, he was happy and on to the next thing. I let him get a bag of yogurt-covered cranberries as a super-special treat. Super special. He was practically skipping. My guess is that in a similar situation, Sylvia would still have been screaming at the check-out line. Hopefully by the time she's four her ability to transition and to let things go will be amplified.

In the mean time, I have this great image in my head of Andrew curled around Fruity Pebbles on the floor of the grocery store, in the fetal position.

### **A penny for the coffee, a penny for the tea (2009-09-30 09:12)**

This post is the third in my money management series. To start at the beginning, see post one: money management, post two: housing, and post three: food matters here!





Last Friday night (cool person that I am) I spent a couple hours at our grocery store - Woodman's - with my shopping list, coupons, and a clipboard in hand. My mission was to record the prices of the products we most often buy and to also record prices of some cheaper (but less sustainable or "responsible") products.

You all had some great thoughts and suggestions about food, and I put some of it to the test.

For those of you not in the area, Woodman's is a warehouse-type grocery store. The shopping experience is...I'd say...not pleasant. It's also the cheapest place I know of to shop for groceries. In the past, Bryan and I decided to cut our grocery bill (maybe \$10/week) by shopping here instead of at Copps and the Willy Street Co-op. It was a trade-off that allowed us to keep purchasing the food items we wanted (although the produce really does kind of suck).

I wanted to find out if buying all my toiletries, organic groceries, and cleaning supplies at Woodman's was the best strategy, or if I could get some of the same items for less money elsewhere. I found that a few toiletries (deodorant, contact solution, and tooth paste) were all actually cheaper at Woodman's (the contact solution was \$7 instead of \$8) than at Walgreen's. Organic milk, Annie's mac & cheese, and 7th Generation diapers were about equally priced at the Willy Street Co-op (which I'd say specializes in organic and local products). So overall, I'd say that I'm doing pretty well by doing all my shopping at Woodman's. I'd love to buy more at the Co-op or at Trader Joe's, but I feel like I'm saving a bit by doing it this way...and that's allowing me to buy more of the products that I love.



Several of you suggested that I consider using coupons. Some of you were shocked to hear that I have never clipped coupons. I like the 20 % off Gymboree or Macy's coupons I get in the mail, but I really can't think of a time I have clipped grocery coupons. But, hey, I'm willing to try. So I spent a couple hours looking online at various coupon sites. There are hundreds of them. The NY Times did a good article last week on how people are getting into clipping coupons again. I was hoping to find a site where I could enter in all the brands of food that I like and they would let me know when manufacturer coupons became available. As far as I can tell, no such site exists. Instead, I found myself reading through hundreds of coupons for products I don't want (mostly processed foods), and I just felt like I was reading advertisements. I had a bit better luck by going directly the websites for a couple brands I like (Organic Valley milk and Cascade Farms organic frozen vegetables). So I saved a couple dollars using coupons for the first time. Woodman's doesn't have store coupons (or big advertised store sales), so I don't think that the coupon route is going to be a huge saver. If I wasn't as picky...if I didn't want a certain brand of yogurt or breakfast bars or soup...I think coupon clipping would be a lot more of a money saving technique. But after doing research into brands and rather carefully deciding which ones I most want to support, I don't like to switch brands to save \$0.30. Ahh, decisions, decisions.

Next I did a comparison of four products: Coffee, diapers, milk, and eggs. Here's what I found.

#### ☒ Coffee

We go through about a pound of coffee every 4-6 weeks. We grind our coffee at home, and especially since I have friends who have worked in Central American on fair trade coffee, I feel like spending a little extra money on our coffee is a tangible way that I can help the living conditions of people living in some really vulnerable parts of the world. I also like to buy shade grown because I am concerned about the effect the loss of forests are having on bird populations (here's some info from the National Wildlife Federation). Here's a comparison of four brands.

Cafe Fair (local): \$6.99/lb bulk, \$8.49/lb pre-bagged



Equal Exchange: \$8.29/lb bulk

Cameron's regular, fair, or organic/shade grown: \$5.69/lb

Eight-O'clock Coffee: (non-fair trade, organic, etc.) \$5.20/lb

Between the cheap, non-fair trade coffee and the most expensive fair trade option, it looks like a difference of about \$3/month. That's not much. I think we can definitely stick with some version of fair-trade/shade grown without breaking the bank.



## Eggs

We eat lots of eggs...I'd guess about eighteen per week. At Woodman's, there's an overwhelming array of egg options. Customers often stand stupefied while trying to decipher the differences between all the various choices. Organic, free-range, cage-free, vegetarian-fed, Omega-3, brown...how's a person to decide (here's a quick guide and a good NY Times article)! I first decided to buy free-range eggs when I learned that laying hens are often de-beaked to keep them from pecking each other to death in their cage homes. Unless you know the producer, it's hard to feel confident that the chickens really are treated humanely, but I'm hoping the brands I'm supporting are doing their best.

So here's a comparison of some of the brands we choose:

✕ Sparboe Farms:

Cage free brown plus: \$2.39  
Vegetarian-fed brown: \$1.31  
Organic brown: \$3.29

#### Egg Innovations

Cage free white: \$3.49

#### Eggland's Best

Organic: \$3.39

Regular (non-organic or in other ways special) eggs: \$1.00

So for eighteen eggs a week, we spend between \$3.60 and \$5.40 per week on eggs compared to \$1.50/week if we bought standard eggs. In a year (if we really do eat 18 eggs a week), we're spending \$110 to \$203 on premium eggs. That's a lot, but in my opinion, we shouldn't allow farm animals to be raised in in-humane conditions. If we were treating the animals appropriately, I think all eggs would cost more like premium eggs. I think that assuming that we continue to buy premium eggs that I'll do a little more research into the companies that we're supporting to make sure that my extra money is actually supporting upstanding agriculture!

#### Milk

Milk is a big one. Our family drinks about a gallon of milk a week.

One gallon of 1 % milk costs:

Sassy Cow (local, organic): \$6.09

Organic Valley (local, organic): \$5.99

Swiss Valley: \$1.89

Dean's: \$2.49

Home milk delivery from Blue Marble Family Farm: \$8/gallon. So local, so fresh, so much money!

So we're spending a bit over \$4/week to be purchasing organic milk. That's around \$220 over the course of the year. Hmmm. So much data, so little conclusions!

Skipping on to the next topic...

#### Diapers

Sylvia uses about a pack of 30 diapers a week. That's around 5 diapers a day. The brand we've always used is 7th Generation. I love those diapers. Is it possible to love diapers? Well, I do.

Here's a break-down of size 4 diapers:

7th Generation (chlorine-free, great company): \$11.49 ( \$0.38/diaper)

Natural Choice (environmentally sensitive, chlorine-free): \$7.99 ( \$0.26/diaper)

Pure 'n Gentle (just fragrance free): \$6.29 ( \$0.19/diaper)

X Sylvia will probably be potty-trained in the next year, so hopefully this expense will drop off our chart before too long. The most cost-saving choice I could make would be to use the cloth diapers I have sitting in my basement. I used them with Andrew but not Sylvia. This would be a good way to save myself \$10/week! But disposable diapers are easy, easy, easy. I just purchased a pack of the Natural Choice diapers. The company seems to be trying some innovative products, so if I like them, I think I'll switch. The Pure 'n Gentle work alright, but I do like supporting a company that really is making an effort to be "green"!

\*\*\*\*\*

Overall, I think my foray deep into our grocery cart helped me understand a little more clearly where our food dollars are going. I feel good about how we spend our grocery money, so I think that the trick in lowering this budget item is going to mean generally keeping our food on the simple side. Refraining from purchasing salmon filets, rich cuts of beef, excessive berries, or fun but not necessary items might be the way to keep costs down.

Wow. This was a huge post. If you're still reading at this point, congratulations! And now, I'm so curious!! What do you think about all this? What are the food items that your family prioritizes? Should I be shopping at Trader Joe's? If I buy Nestle instead of Ghirardelli chocolate chips, should I feel like I'm being frugal? So many questions. I await your response!

## 5.10 October

### On the road... (2009-10-03 08:13)

I feel a little twitchy because I haven't written a blog post in a few days. Egad!

I'm currently sitting in the Alumni Guest House at Carleton, getting ready for my second day of Alumni Adventures Committee meetings. I just love Carleton. And I so enjoy working with the people on this committee. This is my last in-person meeting (I still have a year of monthly conference calls), and being here on campus, meeting with faculty, discussing possible trips to amazing destinations...it all feels a little final.

While I drove away from my family on Thursday, I really didn't want to go. It's funny how crazy the kids can make me feel sometimes, but as I was driving away, I just kept wanting to turn the car around so I could help put them to bed and then snuggle with Bryan and watch a new episode of Mad Men. I like my family:)

I was just able to log on to the internet this morning, and I found a couple wonderful emails waiting for me.

The first is from Bryan:

I just had to tell you that Andrew peeked his head into Sylvie's room tonight as I was reading her books and he asked if he could read a story to Sylvia. She said yes and got down and sat on his lap on the floor. They flipped through a board book and Andrew read the words and Sylvia turned the pages. When they were all done I suggested Sylvia say "Thanks" and give Andrew a hug. Sylvia stood up in her little footie pajamas and gave Andrew a nice, sweet hug. It was just about the most precious thing I could imagine! I had to share :)

The second is from Andrew himself:

Mommy, we really miss you. We were just watching Robin Hood and we just stopped. We had oranges, bunny crackers and hot chocolate for a snack. We were playing outside and it was very cold. We can't wait to see you.

Love, Andrew, Sylvia, & Bryan

I head back to Madison tonight, but instead of going home, I'm going to Lisa's for her bachelorette party! Yay! It's an 80's theme slumber party:) Her wedding is a week from today. Wooooohooo!

So Bryan's doing solo parent duty for three bedtimes and over two days. Send him a little extra love! He's wonderful:)

Thanks, Hon.

Althea

### **Joe's a newspaper man (2009-10-04 16:15)**

My baby brother (note how that introduction elevates his competency and acknowledges his adult-ness) has written a couple articles for his college newspaper, the Bowdoin Orient. The most recent article was just published on Friday.

Here's an opening excerpt from his article.

In the debate about guns, as in so many others, neither side is willing to acknowledge the salient points and reasonable objections of their ideological opponent. Pro-gun enthusiasts believe that gun regulation is a fundamental violation of the right to self-defense and simply another case of government intrusion. Those who want more gun regulation want to prevent guns from getting into schools and the hands of criminals. read more

x

And here's an excerpt from his first article.

As the August recess comes to a close on Capitol Hill, most political speculation concerns what will happen next to health care reform. With angry constituents at volatile town halls as one of the most well covered news stories of the last month, Congress is filled with anxiety about what the next steps might be. [read more](#)

Now I'm proud of him just for being his cool self and for having the motivation and writing skills to articulate well-reasoned and readable articles. But even more than that, I'm proud of him for making statements.

Over the past five years or so, Joe has been increasingly interested in politics and philosophy, and while he's always been great (OK, sometimes a little annoying) at making philosophical arguments, from my perspective, it's been very arm's length and academic. He's argued points, but (as I've seen it) he's often detached himself from the situation, and it hasn't been clear what his actual opinion was.

In fact, (Joe, sorry to be dissecting you here on my blog), I think that when it came to political or public issues, he looked so much at how the debate was occurring that he didn't let on how he felt about it.

Not that any of us Babler kids do much public pontificating about our political or religious views. I think we're gun shy.

So kudos to you, Joe, for defining an opinion and putting it to words. I am always so proud of you.

xoxo

Althea

### **All in a day (2009-10-05 13:43)**

x

When I was at Carleton last weekend for my Alumni Adventures Committee meeting, I received a gift. I've been the (very distracted by small children) chair of the committee for the last couple years, and I've been serving on the committee in general for five years. This was my last in-person meeting, and as a farwell gift, the committee gave me a book. All In A Day, by Cynthia Rylant and illustrated by Nikki McClure.

It's a lovely, joyous book. It reminds me of some of my favorite passages from Anne of Green Gables and from Laura Ingalls' On the Shores of Silver Lake.

And the illustrations! Nikki McClure is a pretty new illustrator to me, and I am in love, love, love with her.



The author, Cynthia Rylant, has written umpteen-gillion books, and many of them are very special. This one, though, has to be my favorite.

The books starts,

A day is a perfect piece of time  
to live a life,  
to plant a seed,

Then later...

A day is all you have to be,  
it's all you get to keep.

...

So live it well, make it count,  
fill it up with you.  
The day's all yours, it's waiting now...  
See what you can do.

Such a lovely book! I encourage you to go out and check it out yourself!





**Wedding week! (2009-10-05 20:45)**



Saturday is the day! My brother Michael and our lovely Lisa are getting married in six days:) They've been engaged for two years, but somehow when I turned the calendar to October, it seemed shocking that the big day was neigh.

Lisa and Michael have done a wonderful job planning this wedding. They're making it sweet and personal and they are organizing all the details, and yet it seems like it's remained a fun activity...from my perspective, the bride is handling all these last week stresses with remarkable aplomb.

Early October has to be my favorite time of year (don't tell May). Right now the sun is shining through the leaves of our maple tree, and the light is all golden because the leaves are just beginning to be tinted with honey and rust. Our view from our dining table shows five or six maples, all in the green glory, but now, inextricably changing to reds and purples and yellows. I love these early weeks of color. Such an amazing time of year.



Photo of the nine-springs e-way by Madison Guy at Flickr

If the weather cooperates, the ceremony will be held outdoors and the wedding reception will be in the nature center. A large tall-grass prairie surrounds the nature center, and there's a playground nearby that I think my kids will enjoy. It should be a relaxed, beautiful time. Stay tuned for pictures of pumpkins and a beautiful bridal couple in the prairie (please weather, cooperate!).

For those of you attending the festivities, here's a link to a map and directions.

If you're coming to the wedding, it'll be great to see you there!



### **Shopping trip hell (2009-10-06 17:45)**

Sylvia needs some warm white or cream tights for Michael and Lisa's wedding this weekend. She wouldn't nap this afternoon, so I thought, "Hey, this is an opportunity to get tights." Riiiiight.

As we pulled up to the mall, I realized that this mall shopping trip was the first I could remember doing with both kids. Andrew cried for about 10 minutes because he didn't want to go into the mall because "it's unfamiliar!"

Eventually, we walked in. I was carrying Andrew (clutched to my chest) while Sylvia pranced ahead, greeting all the other shoppers while spinning and twirling. We went into Gymboree and the Children's Place. No thick white tights luck. Sylvia spotted an area where they have about eight rides...you know, the kind you put a few quarters in and the cars move around and play a song. I told her we would stop there after the next store. She screamed the whole walk to JC Penny's, as I did a quick scan for tights, and our whole walk back from JC Penny's. Then I let her and Andrew play on the cars for maybe a half hour.

I tried to give her warnings that we were going to leave. I said it was time but decided to give her a few extra minutes. When I finally pulled her off the cars, she was livid. Her rage (I ended up carrying her horizontally under my

arm and she kicked and flailed) lasted at least a half-hour.

I decided that if she was going to scream and carry-on, I might as well try to accomplish something. So we drove to Babies 'R Us. No tights, but she screamed and raged the entire time. Then we went to Old Navy. I left Andrew in the car to give him a few moments peace. I walked to the back of the store where the socks were, set Sylvia down, and when I looked up, she was most of the way to the front door. FYI, Old Navy also does not carry thick white tights. But they do have black ones...

On the drive home, I managed to talk Sylvie down. Or maybe she came out of the "red zone" all on her own. There was much discussion about how fun the cars were and how she especially liked the caterpillar and the red dog and the space ship. We lamented that Poodle and her paci were at home, and we contemplated about how much fun it would be to see them when we got home.

I thanked Andrew for his patience with his sister, and I apologized for dragging them around to five stores and even then not finding the intent of our trip.

Now Sylvia is home and she has Poodle and paci and is playing just fine. I don't think I'll be taking the kids back to the mall any time soon. Maybe they can go back when they are teenagers.

x

This child appears to be enjoying his ride

### **Podcasts that make my day (2009-10-07 07:16)**

I've had an iPod for about a year now, and I just love it! I love having all our music so easily accessible. I like being able to make mixes so easily and how fun it can be to use smart playlists or Genius to create the musical backdrop for our playtime.

However my favoritest part about using an iPod is being able to download podcasts and listen to them when I have some alone time in the car or the kitchen. Prior to becoming an iPod convert, I didn't get what a podcast was. And quite frankly, I thought that people who used that and other cooky words were just purposefully being a bit geeky.

But now I've joined the fold. For those of you not in the podcast-listening world, podcasts are radio shows (or in some case video shows) that you can download and listen to or watch at your leisure.

I have several radio shows that I really enjoy, but it's rare that I happen to (be allowed to) listen to the radio when they're on. So I started my podcast listening by subscribing to those shows. Then I did some exploring and found other NPR shows that I also really love.

In the spirit of sharing...and with the hope that this post will inspire you to share as well...here's my favorite podcasts. These shows made my recent trip to and from Minnesota so very enjoyable. So without further ado, here's my favs:

This American Life. There was a point in my life when I was turned off by Ira Glass. But now, this is hands down my favorite show. I love it. An hour of insightful, cooky, disturbing, important, mind-bending, or humorous radio that makes me feel like a more complete person. I just donated \$20 to the show to support them and to help them keep their podcasts free!

x

This I Believe. I LOVE this show. Love it. It nearly always makes me cry or smile deep down inside. And after each essay, I feel somehow more connected to humanity. Come to think of it, it's a little like my version of church. Each podcast is short...maybe 5 minutes. And in that time, someone reads an essay they wrote which describes a deeply held belief. From "I believe in the power of love to heal" to "I believe in the Beatles."

I really do feel like a better person after listening to a handful of these essays. The radio series is over now, but they are still offering podcasts. They're also releasing podcasts of the 1950s This I Believe, which is interesting because of the historical figures who share their beliefs, the things it reveals about society at the time, and the ways it demonstrates that people stay the same.

I sent in a contribution to the This I Believe, Inc., a non-profit that helps schools and community groups by helping people write and share statements of belief. I hope you're able to catch some of these episodes (or check out the book). In reviving this series in 2005, executive producer Dan Gediman said, "The goal is not to persuade Americans to agree on the same beliefs. Rather, the hope is to encourage people to begin the much more difficult task of developing respect for beliefs different from their own." Enjoy!



So those are my two favorites, but here are some others that I also really enjoy:



The Splendid Table. My dad actually turned me on to this show on NPR years ago. Lynne Rossetto Kasper is a wonderful host. The taglines for the show are: "The show for people who love to eat." and "The show about life's appetites." She has interesting guests, and the enthusiastic and sultry way she describes food makes my mouth water. It's a good listen!

Carleton College's convocation addresses. They have audio and video of their weekly speakers.

Stories! I love short stories, and I've found a few great podcasts of short stories including:

- The Moth Podcast
- Selected Shorts Podcast (PRI)
- StoryCorps Podcast (NPR)

I also enjoy:

- Storynory for audio stories for the kids
- To the Best of Our Knowledge (PRI)
- Story of the Day (NPR)

So that's my list! I hope you're able to check out some of them (you can listen to all of them on the computer if you're on an iPod type!). Now help me expand my world. What are some things I should be listening to?

### **Granny is here! (2009-10-08 14:43)**

It's wedding time! Last night, Bryan's mom arrived, and I'm delighted that she's going to be staying with us until Tuesday. Joe; Maretta & Kyle; Heather, Michael, & baby Evelyn; and Aunt Julie, Kevin, and their baby also are coming into town today. Yay!!





Yesterday, Terry and I visited a pumpkin patch and a flower shop, and we purchased a van-full of pumpkins and glorious fall mums for wedding decorations.



Today's weather is a bit cold, rainy, and dreary. Makes me glad that the Lussier Center has a good indoor option for the wedding ceremony!

Just wait until you see the adorable Godzilla costume Granny made for Andrew, and the great jumper and dress-up skirt she made for Sylvie!









### **Wedding rehearsal day! (2009-10-09 15:07)**

It's Michael & Lisa's wedding T-1.

I did a photo session this morning with Heather, Evelyn, and Heather's mom and grandma.

The rehearsal is in a couple hours.

!Weee!

### **Wedding rehearsal pics (2009-10-10 23:13)**

It's the day of Michael and Lisa's wedding! This morning, Michael, Joe, Maretta, Heather, and I met out at the Lussier Nature Center to decorate the reception room and to set up the (now indoor!) ceremony site. It's been partly sunny with temperatures in the high forties. Snow fell earlier today.

Michael is wearing a kilt, and Lisa has a strapless dress, so we thought that no one would be pleased with the idea of an outdoor ceremony!

Last night, a group of us gathered outdoors at the Center to rehearse the wedding. Lisa's sister Julie will be standing up with her, and Joe is standing up with Michael. Julie, Joe, Maretta, and myself are doing the readings. And our dear family friend Jack is officiating. It should be lovely!

Lisa's family is up from Florida, and I think we've given them quite a shock with this chilly weather. Hard to believe that the mercury has dropped so much in the last few weeks!

After the rehearsal, we headed over to Pedro's west for a lovely dinner. My aunt Julie, Kevin, and their little guy joined us; Heather and Michael were there, Topsy has flown out from Oregon, and a couple of Michael and Lisa's friends had also driven in from out-of-town.

Andrew's going to be the ring bearer, and he's planning on keeping the rings tied to the neck of his large stuffed elephant. I'm looking forward to seeing how he handles his official duties!

It's been a life-saver to have Granny here. My mind is all over the place as I work on all the last-minute wedding coordination details. Good to know that Sylvia and Andrew are being well-cared for while I plan and execute wedding plans and Bryan has been paint-balling, bachelor-partying, and mini-golfing with the groom.

Pictures from the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner are in the gallery. A few select pictures are also shown below. Check that...just one. I need to get dressed for the wedding!!!





### **Married! (2009-10-11 00:37)**

Michael and Lisa are now Mr. and Mrs. I've got a new sister, and Michael has an expanded family. It was a wonderful wedding. A beautiful day. I cried, I laughed, I danced. And right now, at 11:20pm, I have a big smile on my face, thinking back on conversations and moments shared with good friends and family.

This morning, as snowflakes filled the air and the thermometer proclaimed low numbers, we decided to pull the ceremony indoors. It turned out that with the big windows looking out on the prairie, the big pots of mums, and the orangy pumpkins, it was lovely indoors as well.

I sobbed a bit when Lisa came down the aisle on her dad's arm. I cried a bit harder when Michael took her hand. Such emotion!

Andrew was the ring bearer, and he had the rings tied on a ribbon around the neck of his stuffed elephant. What a cutie! He stood up front next to Joe, and he was so cheerful and calm and proud that it just made me glow with love for that little darling. When Joe stepped over to the podium to do his reading, Andrew hopped sideways to stay next to him. And when Lisa requested, he handed her the elephant so she could retrieve the rings.

Lisa's sister, Julie and Maretta also gave readings, and Jack gave a heart-felt address.

Michael and Lisa wrote beautiful vows for each other, and I got to close the ceremony with the Apache Wedding Blessing. It was a really lovely ceremony.

The reception was held upstairs, and after a yummy dinner, we were all treated to an amazing pumpkin cake.

Thank heavens that Bryan's mom is here to help with the kids! They ran about and had lots of fun while I tended to wedding details and had fun watching the celebration unfold.

Now it's midnight, and I've got dozens of photos uploading. So in my world, it feels like the event has some closure. Photo-obsession...

Tomorrow morning, we head over to Michael and Lisa's for present-opening and to visit with her family one more time before they head back to Florida. The party continues!

Stay tuned (or check out Flickr) for photos ! Check out the pictures in the gallery!



### **Wedding photos (2009-10-11 10:06)**

All my wedding photos are now online for your viewing pleasure.



- Wedding rehearsal and rehearsal dinner
- Saturday morning wedding set-up
- Althea and Heather's wedding pictures

We're going to be heading over to Michael and Lisa's this morning. My car is chock-full of wedding decor...

And now...here are a few of my favorite pictures from the evening.

















### **Video of Sylvia spinning (2009-10-12 21:32)**

Sylvie was having a great time at the wedding reception. Spin, spin, spinning. Here's a video of her (complete with Poodle and her paci).

[flickr video=4006508385]

Thanks to Granny for taking the video. I swear that Sylvia had not been drinking at the time of this video:)

Oh, and LuAnn made this beautiful jumper. Isn't she amazing!!

### **I love to work! (2009-10-14 09:05)**

I just dropped Andrew off at preschool for the morning. And this is Sylvia's day at Donna's daycare. So for the next 3.75 hours, I have time for myself.

I'm going to work on a budget explanation document for the preschool. And I'm so excited. And I think it's a little silly to be giddy about such things. So I'm sharing with you.

Last night I stayed up until midnight working on the preschool's personnel policies. I was loving it.

I'm also looking forward to working on making some promotional materials for Althea Dotzour Photography. And I have a money management blog post floating around in my head that needs to be written.

It's all these "work" things...quiet, computer-focused time that makes me feel so good. I'm so glad that I am home with the kids and get to play with them as much as I want. I'm also really thankful that I have the time and ability to have a few outside-of-home work hats that keep my brain active, my creativity charged, and my soul content.

So now, it's time to work!

### Running on the edge (2009-10-15 13:52)



Why is it that I'm in a mode these days where I'm regularly running almost late. I'm doing it to myself. I don't want to get dressed or brush my hair or find my shoes until I need to be out of the house in two minutes. Like I actively dislike being ready to go before it's time.

Maybe it's a reaction to having to get the kids ready so much before we have to go. If we want to leave the house at 3pm, I should have them both dressed by 2:30. That gives us 20 minutes to play and 10 minutes to get on coats and shoes and get into the car.

I've found many times in the last several months where I purposefully, unconsciously, or accidentally work

on the computer (in my pajamas) until the moment I am supposed to be in the car.

Yet I'm almost always on time. A minute late maybe. Sometimes a minute early. There's just some crazed running around before I leave the house. Maybe I need to return to some old FlyLady habits of getting dressed first thing in the morning including hair and makeup (if any).

My mom normally ran 5-20 minutes late, and it sometimes drove me a bit crazy. So this aversion to getting ready that I'm experiencing is a little funny. Hmmm.

I think I'm in the "observing" phase of behavior change. Like "gee, that doesn't seem like a great way to be" kind of observation. Then I'll start talking about how to change and then I'll start committing to change and maybe eventually I'll change. Or maybe not. I do like being in my pajamas on a gray fall day!

How about you? Are you early? How much before you're going to leave the house do you get ready? Does standing around the house all ready to go make you crazy or does it feel good? These are the deep questions I pose to you today.

Now (since I'm clothed and have my contacts in) I'm off to the post office and the grocery store!

### **First friends (2009-10-16 11:28)**

Sylvia is (thank heavens!!) exiting a phase where she wasn't able to happily play with kids her age. Get togethers with Celia or with Rayna were, uh, challenging.

But in the last month, the earth has shifted, a new season is upon us, and Sylvie is reveling in her friendships.

This morning, Rayna has been visiting, and the two girls are playing so well. In fact, they are happily chattering to each other in the sunroom right now.

Check out these cute pictures I took of our morning.









and then...



**Kids on the farm (2009-10-17 20:36)**

Andrew, Sylvia, and I had a fun time visiting a farm today! We met up with some of the families from my mom's group at the Hinchley Dairy Farm, just west of Madison.





It was so fun to spend a couple hours on a real, working dairy farm! I had several friends who were dairy farmers back in high school, but it's been years and years since I spent an afternoon hanging around a dairy operation. Tina Hinchley, farmer extraordinaire, drove a group of us on a tractor hay ride out to the pumpkin patch to pick out some pumpkins. Andrew and Sylvia found good ones right away!



Tina then took us on a tractor ride through their dairy barn where they keep the cows that aren't currently being milked. I learned that it takes a couple years for a heifer to be old enough to be bred, and she produces milk for the first part of her pregnancy and then for 7-9 months after the calf is born. Then it's back to getting pregnant.

[Aside: sooooo glad I'm not a cow.]

Andrew and Sylvia were both so interested in the sights and sounds of the dairy. Our group wasn't too big, and being at the farm tour felt low-key...unlike some of the major circus productions that some pumpkin patch/corn maze/haunted house/apple patches are this time of year!



The kids had fun following some free-ranging chickens around, and they both enjoyed pulling kernels off dried corn cobs and feeding the corn to goats, turkeys, geese, chickens, and even (unsuccessfully) offering it to some super-soft bunnies.





Andrew never got too worried about loud noises (I wasn't sure how he'd feel about the tractor, but it wasn't too noisy and he was quite engrossed in the whole tour.



Can you believe I got a picture of a smiling boy? He even walked up to me knowing that I was taking pictures!



I didn't get any pictures of or friends...we overlapped with them for about half of the tour. But it sure was great to see some of those kiddos again!



It was neat to see how much the Hinchley family cares about their animals. Running a farm is a complicated undertaking, and spending a couple hours there reminded me how very many aspects there are to being a farmer.

When we went to the milking barn, we got to pet the new calves. Sylvia loved to let them lick her with their scratchy tongues.





This little fellow here was only a couple days old. There was even one born yesterday!



We had the opportunity to hand milk a cow, but my kids declined. The group had grown significantly by then. I'd love to take Andrew back for a smaller tour, because I think he might have been more adventurous if there wasn't as much activity in the milking barn. He and I closed our eyes and imagined what it would be like there at night...cows chewing cud, some moo-ing, some pooping, the smell of the feed...

Going out to the horse barn at night was one of my favorite things about having horses. I love the stillness and the sounds of barns.

I'll leave you with an image of an amazing turkey. He was huge. Tina said he'd be 30-40 pounds! Look at those colors on his head! He was really showing off for our group.







Pictures from our farm trip can be found in the gallery.

**BEWARE: Monsters below (2009-10-18 08:36)**



While we haven't watched Godzilla movies since June, the monsters still feature prominently in Andrew's play-time universe. He loves to watch clips of the movies on YouTube on Terry's iPhone, and he regularly requests that I look up pictures of his monsters using Google images.

Here's Andrew, sporting his cool Godzilla hat and mitten costume (made by his amazing granny).



Here's Sylvia wearing some hand-colored Mothra wings (also by Granny). For those of you not familiar with Mothra, she's a giant moth who (temporarily) defeats Godzilla to protect her egg. According to Andrew, she's very good.



You'll know for sure that Mothra is good because Andrew is smiling sweetly in the photo below. "That's because she's sooo nice."



King Ghidora on the other hand...not nice. Also, he has three heads. Andrew was rapidly waving his head from side to side when I took this picture. When I inquired why he said, "Because then maybe in the picture it will look like I have three heads too!"





This guy below isn't technically a monster. It's a frilled lizard. But it's part of the monster gang.



Oooo. Even without a toy, Andrew is still terrifying! Someone, help!!! Save me from my son!! I fear I shall be devoured!



That boy!



Aaak! Godzilla himself!



But really, he's just sweet:)



**Chesser (2009-10-19 07:00)**

I don't normally post much about Bryan on this blog. He used to have his own blog, and for the most part, I don't think that tales of computer programming are really my forte.

But I wanted to share that I've been excited and proud of him this year for really getting into playing chess. He plays online extensively (he's CuervoKing on chess.com if anyone out there is a chess player looking for a partner!) He spent all day yesterday in Milwaukee playing in a tournament. It's his fifth tournament of the year. I love knowing that despite a demanding job and a (perhaps more!) demanding set of kids, Bryan's able to find time for a little recreation. Actually, one of my goals for 2009 was to support him in expanding his leisure activities, and I'd say at least when it comes to chess, we have achieved success:)

Bryan won three of the four games he played yesterday, and the game he lost was to the guy who won the whole tournament, so he came home pretty happy.

Here's a picture of him playing (back left).



You'll have to try to ignore the young girl who's staring irritably at the camera while kneeling on her pink sneakers. Sometimes those little kids are just wicked-smart!

The chess folks also uploaded some videos of people playing chess at the tournament. Here's a clip of some champions at work:

[youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9h8tG06ccU>]

Somebody wrote up a blog post about the tournament. It's where I grabbed the photo, so if you're interested, you can see more!

Ooo, I also just found a link to Bryan's US Chess Federation profile page. Honey, I'm doing research about you! I also discovered that you have played 584 games on chess.com. That's a lot!!

In other news, Bryan has been doing a version of Extreme Workdays this past week. He's been coming home for dinner and the kids' bedtimes and then working until close to midnight most evenings (we took off Friday night and caught up on Mad Men...finished season 1!). Bryan went into work on Sunday morning, and as of 9pm, he's still not home.

His office has an end-of-November (or maybe now it's end-of-the-year) deadline, and there's a mid-deadline on Monday, so my sweet guy is putting in 110 %. It doesn't seem to get him down, though. He's such a dedicated worker:)



It's times like these, when things in his office kind of blow up that I'm especially glad that I don't also have an out-of-the-home job. When he needs to put in some extra hours, we both put in extra hours, and it works just fine. If we were juggling two jobs, though, it would be trickier!

I leave you with a picture of my sweetie:



### **Sylvia in costume (2009-10-20 08:00)**

Hopefully, Sylvia will be a blue bunny for Halloween. Bryan's mom brought a costume she had made for him as a toddler, and I'm hoping that I can convince my young miss to wear it...at least for pictures!...in the next few days.

LuAnn also made Sylvia a great skirt, and I thought that these pictures might be just the thing to get your Tuesday morning off to a happy start.









Sylvia loves to dress up in necklaces and scarves. She also loves to walk around the house in other people's shoes. Andrew's. Mine. Bryan's (SIZE 15!). She's remarkably adept at staying upright in a variety of footwear. And she especially loves my heels. It's pretty funny to hear my 20-month-old clomping down the hall in a pair of my high-heeled shoes.

Today as I was getting dressed, she carefully lined up a (miss-matched) pair of high heels and then pulled on my pant leg until I came over to her. She continued tugging on my pants...clearly indicating that I step into the footwear that she had picked out for me. That girl!

**Thoughtful Thursday (2009-10-22 08:51)**



This post title has been re-named to better reflect reality. (Just so you know, it's not Wednesday!)

**Homemade yumminess (2009-10-23 07:12)**

I have more money-management posts coming soon...thoughts are swirling in my head and are about ready to be born...but in the meantime I wanted to share a couple items that I normally purchase that I've taken to making myself. It's nothing big, and I'm not saving many dollars, but it feels satisfying to discover that I can save a few bucks while easily making something that I somehow thought was rather complicated.

The items are...

Drumroll....



Tomato sauce!

and...

ooo, the anticipation..



We don't buy a lot of processed food in our house, but it didn't really occur to me that spaghetti sauce was processed. In fact, I really never considered the fact that tomato sauce (for spaghetti) could be made from scratch. Growing up, Mom always got Prego and then juiced it up with extra herbs and molasses and hamburger. Bryan and I have had a crush on Classico spicy tomato pesto. mmmmm good stuff.



Then one day, I decided to buy a big can of crushed tomatoes. I poured in a few tablespoons of olive oil. I added a small pile of oregano and a bit of basil. I pressed in a couple cloves of garlic. And yum! I actually can't tell a difference in the flavor between it and a jar of sauce. And the prep time is almost no different. Opening a jar of prepared spaghetti sauce and heating it takes maybe three minutes. Opening a can of tomatoes, tossing in oil spices and (sometimes garlic powder if I'm in a real hurry) while heating it takes maybe four minutes. Easy, cheesy! And I'm saving at least a dollar:)

My second homemade item is a little less standard. You see, I really like to make myself vanilla lattes in the morning. I like a cup of 3/4 steamed milk and 1/4 coffee with a shot of vanilla syrup. Recently I ran out of my syrup and was feeling a little guilty about spending a couple dollars on a new bottle. So I looked it up, and it turns out that it's the easiest thing ever to make. Two cups of sugar and two cups of water. Boil. Add a vanilla bean (scraped first if you'd like). And I even happened to have a container of Penzy's vanilla beans on hand. So now I have my homemade (non-sugar free) syrup in my old syrup bottle. It's supposed to keep for six months in the fridge. I shall, however, devour it all before then!

So that's my news for the day. Lovely made-from scratch items that make me smile.

Oh, here's something else that makes me smile:



mmmm. I love Ghirardelli chocolate chips!

I'd love to hear from you! Do you have any easy made-from-scratch items that you'd like to share?



## My siblings (2009-10-24 07:31)

Michael and Lisa's wedding weekend was great. It was a wonderful wedding...and oh how I love weddings. Family and friends gathered from near and far. I loved it.



Thinking back, the part of the weekend that makes my heart feel the coziest (other than while I was sobbing at the wedding ceremony) was having me, Michael, Mareta, and Joe all together again. We were all in the same place one day in June, and the last time before that was at Christmas time. And there's just something so special about all of us being together.

Maybe it's a bit that there's a part of mom in each of us, so when the four of us are together, She feels more present. Maybe it's because Mom herself...however she is right now...somehow celebrates when her four chicks are back where they can all be counted at once. Maybe it's just because I love my siblings so dang much that little in this world makes me happier than when we're together.



In any case, I'm still feeling happy about the fact that we were all able to play together for a few days. I'll long hold on to the memory of the four of us and Heather setting up the reception site. We were singing along to Beatles songs while we laid down table clothes, decorated tables with pumpkins, and folded napkins. What a joyful day!

I love that the purpose of us being together was to celebrate Michael and Lisa's wedding. What a wonderful new sister we have!



### Art supply box (2009-10-25 07:46)

For Andrew's fourth birthday, Bryan's mom made him a special box filled with great art supplies. It's compact, but it contains about any fun art supply you can think of. And Andrew loves it because it's special for him.



Last week, I did a by-pass surgery on our ailing art supply drawer. We have a large buffet drawer filled with art supplies, but it's been dumped out and pawed through so many times that any order or reason have fled and left chaos in their wake. Simply put, you could hardly open or close it. So I cleaned it out and re-organized it, and in the process, I also did a little re-organizing of Andrew's art box.

Since then, he's been just smitten with his art projects. It's funny how when you pull out a toy and shine it up a bit that it can take on such a new life. Andrew's been enjoying his art box more than ever, and I can often find him (in his room with the door closed for privacy) working hard on stencils or collages or pipe-cleaner creations.



Granny, thanks so much for such a great present. Your boy sure is enjoying it!

### **Leaf-filled yard (2009-10-26 07:00)**

Our beautiful maple tree in our front yard is at its peak of amazing yellow. I wish I could bottle the color of yellow as the sun shines through the many layers of yellow leaves. It's just magic. I capture it in my mind and hold it close to help add brightness to some of the gray months to come.





I thought you might enjoy some pictures of our yard (on a less sunny day) as Sylvia was having a blast running through the leaves.

You may notice that she has her pacifier in all these pictures. I wish she didn't. I tried to convince her that she didn't need it. But she won. That girl has a will of steel. Especially when I don't really care.

Anyway, enjoy...







Here she is pushing Poodle in her swing. So cute! It was all her idea.



Running, running through the leaves.



Our street is carpeted with yellow leaves. I love the way the puddles are hiding under their blanket.



Leaves are so fun to run through! Last year, Sylvia was only crawling, so this is her first month of leaf-running excitement!



A few last hardy flowers are blooming in my garden.





Impression. Leaves blowing in the wind.



This &^ % \$ squirrel is annoying. He's brazen and sassy...



...and he eats my pumpkins.



I used to have about six gourds. They're gone. And Sylvia's pumpkin is squirrel-meat. It's already eaten all the seeds inside!

Sylvia doesn't care, though. She's having too much fun with the leaves!



Happy fall, everyone! Photos are in the gallery.





**Fun with friends (2009-10-27 07:14)**

We've gotten to see quite a bit of Eli and Celia these past weeks. And it's been lovely. They're such wonderful kids, and I love to watch them all play together.

For your viewing pleasure, here's a few pictures of some kiddos enjoying the world and each other...







And on another morning...

Beware the jaguars!







**Melanie is visiting! (2009-10-28 22:20)**

I'm typing this up on Wednesday night at 10pm. Bryan is still at work at the office. He's been working so very hard!!

I just processed hundreds of pictures from Andrew's preschool Halloween party. Those little kids in costumes are just the cutest. And it's pretty clear that I'm going to need a new computer soon. I love my laptop, but it's just not robust enough to handle the photo editing that I'm trying to make it do. I usually have a book next to me to read between clicks...as my computer goes, "Kerchunk, kerchunk...you want me to do what???"



Melanie is flying up from Texas tomorrow, and we're all so excited for her visit. She'll be staying with us through the weekend, and then Andrew is going to hop on the plane with her, and together they will fly back to Texas. Then Andrew will be visiting her and then Granny and Grandad until November 10. He talks about his upcoming trip very regularly, and he's had his backpack packed for weeks. It's safe to say that he loves his family, and he loves Texas. It's warm there, you know!



We've had a stretch of amazing weather. The weekend was stunning. Gorgeous color, lots of sunshine. Ahhh, beautiful autumn warms the soul. Bryan had a two-day chess tournament over the weekend. Since it was held in



downtown Madison, the kids and I spent both days down at Terry's condo, and we got to see Bryan between matches. Bryan had an intense day on Saturday, losing two of three games, and then on Sunday, he ended up winning both games, and rarely have I seen my boy so fired up about a challenge. From my perspective, chess is a lot like rock climbing. You're trying to find a path to your goal...you're trying to think out risks...you're calculating dozens or hundreds of possibilities in hopes of finding the optimal trail. It can be exhilarating and demanding and exhausting. That might be where the similarities end :-). Since he pulled out three wins, Bryan won his class for the tournament. And he brought home Michael's sundays to celebrate!



Andrew spent the weekend expanding his horizons too. On Saturday, Terry took him to a silent movie at Overture Center. When I was little, Terry took me and the kids (that's Michael, Maretta, and Joe) to many, many silent movies through Duck Soup Cinema. Andrew really enjoyed seeing Buster Keaton play Sherlock Jr. He brought home a balloon hippo that we've been playing with for the past several days.

Andrew and I went to a theater last year to see *The Tail of Despereaux*, but this is his second movie in a theater. I like knowing that he has had such limited exposure to popular culture!! I'm sure *Sherlock Jr.* was very popular back in 1924.



Then on Sunday, Andrew went to his second play (his first being A Christmas Carol). Terry took him to see the musical Little Women. Terry reported that Andrew did very, very well. The play ended up being 2 hours and 40 minutes, which is a bit too long for a four-year-old. Andrew got kind of wiggly after about two hours. Terry said that they quietly flamed the actors by breathing Godzilla fire to pass the time. But when they came home, Andrew talked animatedly about how much he enjoyed it! He said that the story reminded him a little of Cinderella.

I did a photo session this evening with a little girl who is so cute it's nearly unreasonable. Instead of cleaning up the house (sorry Mel!), I think I'll look at those pictures now.

Toodles!

### **Playing in the leaf-strewn yard (2009-10-29 10:00)**

You may be tired of looking at pictures of my kids playing in the leaves, but I'm not! So here you go.

Sylvia pushes Poodle around in the stroller.



I cannot keep shoes on this girl! I am so glad that the weather warmed up. It is such a struggle to get her shoes on, and then even when it's 50 degrees and raining, I turn around and she's barefoot. She must be related to my mom.



Sylvie sure does like her bike. I love the color! I'm so glad I picked pink. I think of it as lilac:)



The squirrels haven't eaten this pumpkin. Much. yet.



They have eaten this pumpkin. A lot. It's gross.





Oh, how do I love our maple tree! Let me count the ways. As many ways as there are leaves.



Andrew got a fun bubble kit from Bryan's co-worker, Dawn. He anticipated playing with it for several cold and rainy days, and then he was joyous to finally get to try it out. He had a blast sticking bubbles to leaves.







And I'll leave you with a pretty picture. Isn't this a lovely plant?



Happy fall everyone!

**Sibling love (2009-10-30 07:34)**

Andrew doesn't usually like to have his picture taken. Until, suddenly, he does. In the last week, there have been a remarkable number of times that he has requested that I take his picture. Especially when he's snuggling with Sylvia. I've been happy to oblige, and here are some of the results.

Be still my heart.











If you'd like any of these images as you desktop background or as a high resolution image to take to your local tattoo parlor to have permanently emblazoned on your arm, you can get them here (click on "all sizes")!

### **Halloween 2009!!! (2009-10-31 06:48)**

Andrew has a grand Godzilla costume made with love by his granny. And Sylvia is a blue bunny (from the 1946 story, Bunny Blue). This is the same blue bunny costume that Bryan wore when he was a babe. Here, for your Halloween enjoyment, are pictures of my kiddos in their Halloween duds. They're so cute! And I'm so lucky they have a grandma who loves to sew for them!









And now...(watch out!!)...Godzilla.















More photos of kids in costumes (I really held back here in this post!) are available in the photo gallery!

### **The ghosts of Halloween's past (2009-10-31 20:47)**

I'm uploading pictures from tonight's trick-or-treating extravaganza. Well, maybe not truly an extravaganza, but I think it felt that way for the kids! After a nice costumed romp in our major leaf piles, we traversed the neighborhood with Alivia, Rayna, Kathy, and Brett. After eight houses, both Andrew and Alivia were suggesting that we stop. It's so nice to live on a quiet dead-end street. Our kids are the big show in town:)

I just looked back at some of the pictures I've taken of Andrew and Alivia (and their baby sisters as they came around), and it's so cute, I had to share. More Halloween pictures tomorrow!

2003

Back in Ann Arbor, April was a dragon...



2005

Andrew (four months) is a dragon!

954



Brett, Alivia (18 months old), and Kathy came by to trick-or-treat.



2006

The next year, we did our own mini-round of door-knocking. Andrew (16 months) is a duck and Alivia (two-and-a-half).

956



2007

Little Rayna is dressed as a pea in a pod. She's just under two months old!



Alivia (three-and-a-half-years old) is a ladybug!





Andrew (two years old) on his first real trick-or-treating. He loved it! Here his mouth is stuffed full of chocolate.



2008

It was a warm evening. Alivia (four year old) wasn't feeling well but didn't want to miss the party. And Rayna (13 months) was the cutest fairy ever!

960



Look who else joined the party! Sylvia's first Halloween! She's a bear, and Andrew is a giraffe.



2009

Tonight, the moon was round, the neighborhood owls set the ambiance with lots of hooting, and our four kids ran up and down the street together.

Rayna (bumblebee) is two, Alivia (a princess) is five, Andrew (Godzilla) is four, and Sylvia (Bunny Blue) is 20 months.



How quickly they grow up. We're so lucky to have good friends!





Happy Halloween!!

## 5.11 November

### Trick-or-treating (2009-11-01 07:48)

I'm one of those moms who follows my trick-or-treating kids with a camera. It's just who I am. I've come to accept it.

One of the perks, is that I get to share these pictures with you! There's a whole album here.



























Hope your Halloween was sweet and your sugar high was lively! Ours sure was:)

**Fun times with Aunt Mel (2009-11-02 07:13)**

It was so great having sweet Melanie visiting us for the last four days. Here's some pictures of our fun times together. More are available in the gallery.





















### **Andrew's adventure (2009-11-03 07:07)**

On Sunday afternoon, Andrew and his aunt Melanie hopped on a plane and flew down to Dallas. Andrew was so very, very excited about his trip. He'd packed his back-pack about three weeks ago. Apparently, he talked about it all the time at preschool. And he showed absolutely zero trepidation or worry. My boy was GUNG HO about his adventure. He's been in Dallas with Melanie since Sunday, and today Granny is picking him up. He'll spend the next seven days with her and Grandad. Andrew sure does love his family! So do I:)





As we drove away from the airport, Bryan and I both got kind of misty-eyed thinking about our little guy and his big adventure. There's a lot of emotion wrapped up in the process of watching your kids grow up. I felt so proud of him, I missed him, and my heart felt kind of exposed just thinking of the wide experiences he will have outside of our lives together.



If parenting is a continual process of letting go, this was a nice little milestone. Hopefully it'll make it a little easier when he goes to kindergarten and (gasp!) college.



On Sunday afternoon, Sylvia had me and Bryan all to herself, and she LOVED it. We played in the yard and listened to our neighborhood owls hooting from a tree across the street. We played in the leaves and finally raked them all up, we came inside and had a different, quieter three-person dinner. Sylvia reveled in the one-on-one attention. Really, she was basking like a lizard in the sun. I think she'll enjoy this week too.



LuAnn flies Andrew back home on November 10. So until then, I get to be the mama of just a 20-month-old. So far, it's loads of fun!



### **A blue day (2009-11-03 13:39)**

I'm feeling a little sad today. Is that the kind of thing I normally blog about? No. It's also not the way I often feel.

We've heard sad news from several family members in the last week. None of it directly affects our little family of four, but my heart aches in several tender places. Also, Sylvia is having a day filled with meltdowns and obstinance. We went to toddler time this morning, and that was fine, but since then, oh boy... I don't think I ever realized that a little person could feel so much fury for such lengths of time. I feel sad for her. Today, I feel a little sad for myself too.

She just went down for a nap, and I'm really hoping that when she wakes up that her clouds will have passed and the sun will shine for her again.

Ahh well, some days are like this. Thanks for listening :-)





**Good advice (2009-11-04 07:39)**

I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. I've learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life. I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a "life." I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back. I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision. I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou



### **Money management - Travel! (2009-11-05 07:42)**

This post is the fifth entry in my money management series. To start at the beginning, see post one: money management, post two: housing, post three: food matters, and post four: a penny for the coffee, a penny for the tea here!

Over the last year, our third largest spending category (10 % of expenses) was travel. I feel really fortunate that we can be spending a significant portion of our funds on something that is so much fun (as compared to the #4 category - automobiles). Plane tickets are so much more fun than new breaks!



This year we spent the majority of our travel dollars on our July trip to Sweden, but looking over the list brings back other fond memories of smaller trips we've taken. I love getting to see friends and family since we're all so spread out. The internet is great, but spending time together, face to face is definitely the best.

It's about time for us to start mapping out 2010. Bryan and I usually sit down in December or January and figure out what trips we want to take and then map them out over the next couple or few years. Then we make sure we have the vacation time we need and can save up for those travel expenses.

I don't right now, but I used to have a bank account set aside for vacation savings. I had some funds automatically transfer into the account every month from our primary checking account, and then when we wanted to take a trip, we had dedicated money to do so. Now that I've written that down, it sounds like a good idea. I think I should set up an account for that again!

At our current bank (Charles Schwab), I have a primary checking account, a savings account ( \$1,000 emergency fund), and a long-term emergency fund ( slowly working toward saving enough money to cover 6 months of expenses). I think I should also set up accounts to segregate vacation funds and maybe another one for car repairs, and maybe one for household expenses like a roof (eek) or a new sofa.

In general, I hope we can control our other expenses enough that we can afford to allot a sweet percent to something we all love doing so much.

### **Money management - shopping (2009-11-06 20:49)**



When I was a baby, one of my first words was, "Shopping!" I would say it when I saw my grandma (my mom's mom). My mom loved to shop. My grandma loved to shop. My sister loves to shop. I also love to shop. We're bargain hunters. We're quality-finders. We comparison shop and help friends find just what they're looking for, and we love it.

Unfortunately, it costs money.

Fortunately, while I love to shop, I tend to feel like I don't do a lot of it. I felt happy and confident in that notion until I looked at Mint.com and see that we spent over \$4,000 in the "shopping" category in the last 12 months.

Our "shopping" category includes things like clothes, electronics, books, and anything we buy from places like Walgreens or Target.

Bryan and I don't spend money equally. I'm going to guess that I spent 95 % of the dollars spent in the "shopping" category. Bryan isn't the one in our family to buy clothes or to go to Target to stock up on office supplies or to

buy a replacement coffee maker.

This is one category...since it's almost entirely discretionary...that I first cut back on when we need to save some denaros. It's also one that would make a lot of sense to budget this category more closely. I think I have a good sense of what we spend, but if I had cash in an envelope to spend, I'd be sure to stay on budget. I still haven't implemented the cash budgeting system, but I may. On the other hand, Mint.com sends me emails when we're approaching the budget limit, which is pretty helpful.

On the plus side, (according to Mint.com) our family spends less than the USA average on the "shopping" category. And it helps that unless I have someone to watch my kids that shopping isn't too fun an experience in general!

I spent about \$500 on clothes and shoes for Sylvia and Andrew over the last year. That seems like a lot, but then again, much of it is from resale shops...

How does your family handle "shopping" expenses? Do you have a clothes budget for each family member? How do you decide on the best time to purchase things like, oh, a replacement microwave or a new lamp? Are you a compulsive reader of Consumer Reports?

Just wondering :-)

### **Andrew comes home today! (2009-11-10 08:55)**

Bryan's mom is flying Andrew home from Texas tonight! Our little guy has been having a fabulous time in Dallas and in College Station since November 1. As far as I can tell, he's had a supremely wonderful time.

x

He called me a couple times on Aunt Melanie's phone early in his trip, and then I spoke to him one or two other times. It amazes and delights me that he feels so content at Granny and Grandad's home that he doesn't need to check-in too much with us.

x

Meanwhile, here at home, Bryan, Sylvia and I are having a wonderful time. It has been so great to spend one-on-one time with Sylvie. She's been just loving all the focused attention. We talk about Andrew, but since we know he's safe and happy, we've been enjoying the increased quiet and calm around our house!





Speaking of calm, I had no idea how much calmer, and cleaner life would be with one child in the house! It will be great to have Andrew back home, but life has felt pretty easy these last 10 days being the mom of only one. I thought that Sylvia was the noisier, messier kid, but it turns out that when it's just her and me, we have significantly less dishes to wash, clothes to wash, and toys to pick up. Plus, when Sylvia is napping or playing with something on her own, I am free to do whatever I want rather than immediately turning my attention to my boy.

x

So that's meant that at the end of the day, I'm less tired since the overall parenting and home maintenance work was less than what I'm used to. The coolest part, is that Sylvia goes to bed at 7pm. Andrew goes to bed at 8pm, so every night he's been in Texas, I feel like I have had a whole extra hour of free time. I can clean the house for an hour and still have two or three hours of free time. And since I'm less tired, I can get more done in that time! It's been awesome:)

So we've been faring well with his absence. And I CANNOT WAIT to get some Andrew hugs and snuggles. mmmmm It'll be good to have him back home.

THANKS to Melanie, Granny, and Grandad for taking our boy. I am so glad that he had fun with you! Thanks for the parenting vacation!

x

PS. I pulled all the pictures of Andrew from Granny's Facebook page. Thanks, Granny for sharing pics of our guy to keep us smiling while he was away!



### **Andrew is back! (2009-11-13 15:13)**

It's been several days since I've posted, which tends to make me feel a little crazy. But all is well.

Andrew flew back home from Texas on Tuesday night. We had a joyous reunion, and over the next several days, my statements like, "I am so happy you are home!" have been met with the lovely response, "I'm so happy you're home too!"

Andrew had a fabuloso time. LuAnn reported that he was almost never sad, and he came back brim-full of stories and happy memories.

Our little guy went back to preschool on Wednesday...he was excited that his classmates would be happy to see him. We got to see Tom and Terry and got some nice playtime with Eli.

LuAnn stayed with us Wednesday and got some one-on-one playtime with Sylvia while Andrew was at school.

I am typing this pos out with my thumbs, which is a strange and new experience! My home Internet service is down this week, and so I'm posting this from my (new) iPhone.

I did a couple great photo sessions last weekend, and I am loving looking through the images. Being a photographer is so very, very rewarding! What a wonderful thing it is to be able to capture some childhood magic for parents to store and share. I feel really lucky!

Hope your week is fine!

### **Turkey plans (2009-11-14 13:34)**

Lisa stopped over this morning, and the two of us made plans for Thanksgiving. It was fun to look through recipes, think through meal options, and draw up a game-plan.

Mmmmm. I think it'll be a tasty day.

Lisa also brought over proofs from her wedding pictures. They are lovely! I love weddings!

Andrew is whistling while planning out what he'd like me to paint his face. He's thinking maybe a lion or a tiger. Random Saturday face painting.

He just finished reading me the book *The Enormous Turnip*. Such an amazing boy. Sylvie is napping, and Bryan is at a friend's house.

Enjoy your Saturday!

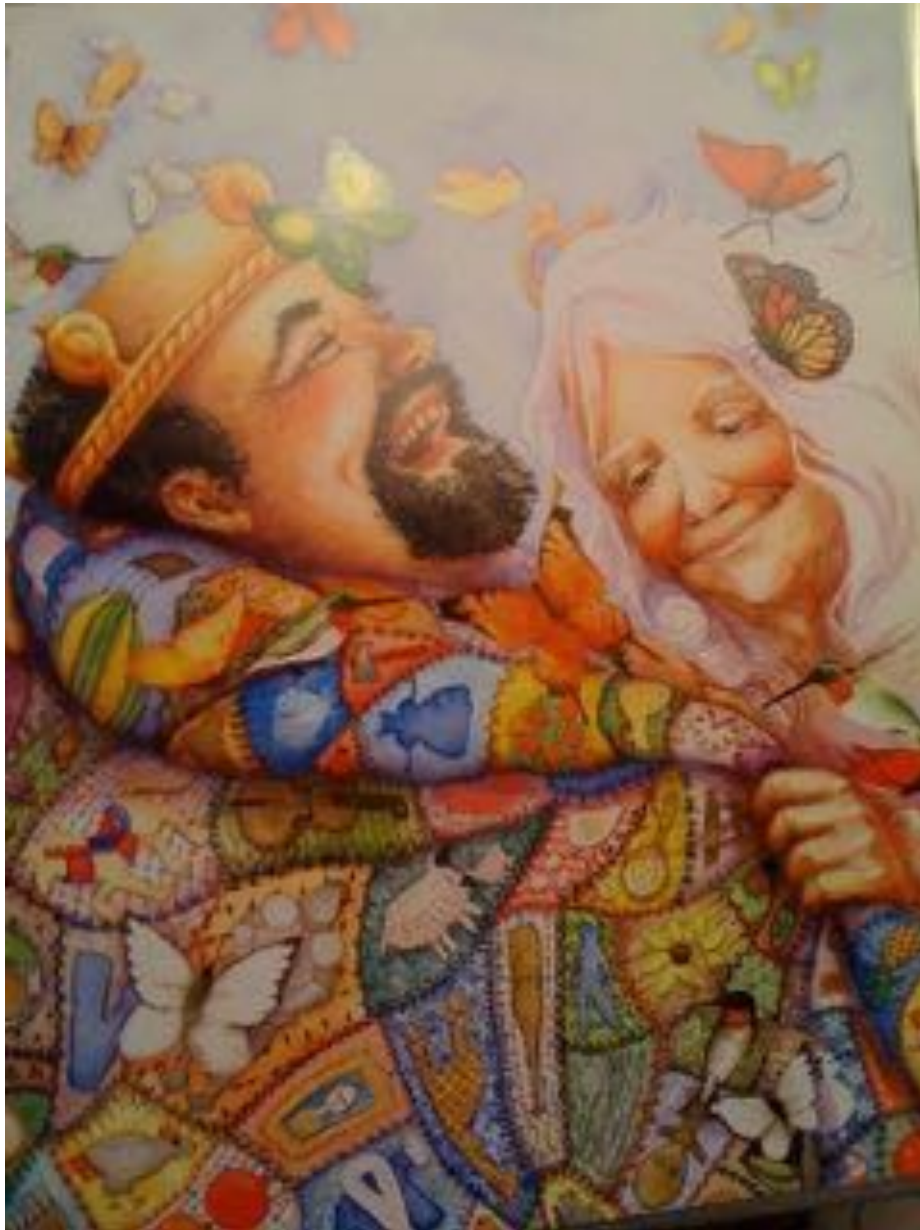
**When she laughs (2009-11-16 22:44)**

Tonight while she was taking a bath, Sylvia gave a peal of laughter that just made my heart sing.

That girl. When she is happy, she reminds me of the king in the book *The Quiltmaker's Gift* whose laugh, "Could make green apples fall and make flowers turn his way."

I found myself musing about what an amazing experience it may be for someone to fall in love with my little Sylvia. I have a feeling that she will someday turn someone's world upside down. Life is more vibrant when it's lived through Sylvia's lens.

My girl has great powers. And her little self brings such joy to my soul.





### **Leaf pile! (2009-11-17 08:00)**

Our neighborhood park is full of oak trees. And this weekend, we discovered that the oak leaves have been put into one big, huge pile of leaves. Since the pile is 20-30 feet in diameter and 3+ feet deep, it was more like a pool of leaves!

We made several visits to the leaf pool over the weekend. It was so fun to watch Bryan toss the kids a few feet in the air and see them disappear, "woosh!" in a puff of leaves.

We hunted for each other. Bryan and I dove in and disappeared. The leaves were dry and fluffy. They smelled like oak and autumn and life. Lying buried beneath them, I felt warm and safe and insulated...until Andrew or Sylvia found me!

The kids wanted face paint on Saturday, so the pictures are of two leopards playing in the leaves.

Note: This post was all thumb-typed on my iPhone. Only three more days without Internet!





















### Thoughts on children to consider today (2009-11-18 07:45)

On Children  
By Kahlil Gibran

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them,  
but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children  
as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and He bends you with His might  
that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
so He loves also the bow that is stable.



**Deep thoughts (2009-11-18 11:20)**

It's Wednesday...my morning without children! Andrew is at preschool and Sylvia is at Donna's house, and I am at the library uploading sweet pictures from a recent photo session.

While I was waiting for my computer to go chug, chug, chugging along (it needs quite a bit of time to process these things...), I wandered over to a display and picked up a book called, *When God Is Gone Everything Is Holy* by Chet Raymo (2008). As I flipped through it, I came across a couple passages that really struck me. I don't know that they are exactly how I feel, but I have rarely found printed words that capture my sense like these did.

I wanted to write some of these down, and I thought I'd write them down here to share them with you. My readers come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and I'm curious what you all think of this.

Here's the first passage I read...page 22. And this is one I really relate to:

I am an atheist, if by God one means a transcendent Person who acts willfully within the creation. I am an agnostic in that I believe our knowledge of "what is" is partial and tentative - a tiny flickering flame in the overwhelming shadows of our ignorance.

Here again is a passage I thought was interesting on page 19

The religious naturalist forgoes a personal God. God defined in our own image. God invested with human qualities: justice, love, will, desire, jealousy, artifice, and so on - in short, the attributes of human personhood.

the author goes on to quote the Greek novelist Nikos Kazantzakis from his book *Spiritual Exercises*:

We have seen the highest circle of spiraling powers. We have named this circle God. We might have given it any other name we wished: Abyss, Mystery, Absolute Darkness, Absolute Light, Matter, Spirit, Ultimate Hope, Ultimate Despair, Silence. But we have named it God only this name, for primordial reasons, can stir the heart profoundly. And this deeply felt emotion is indispensable if we are to touch, body with body, the dread essence beyond logic.

That was interesting, but this part...page 91...was really cool. A geneticist, Dean Hamer, wrote a book called *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes*. Our author says,

The gist of Hamer's argument is this: he has identified a gene that correlates with a personality trait called self-transcendence, as measured on a standard test called a "Temperament and Character Inventory." Self-transcendence is a term used by psychologists to describe spiritual feelings that are independent of traditional religion. It is not based on belief in God, frequency of prayer, or any other conventional religious practice. Self-transcendent people are self-forgetful, and tend to see everything, including themselves, as part of one great totality. They have a strong sense of "at-one-ness" with people, places, and things. They are likely to be environmentalists, or active in the fight against poverty, racism, and war.

wow. Reading that I was thinking, "My goodness...I'm super self-transcendent! Cool! A category!" But then he goes on...



Self-transcendent individuals are mystical. They are fascinated with things that cannot be explained by science. They are creative, but may also be prone to psychosis. In short, they are spiritual, and inclined to believe in God.

Hmmm. Well, maybe I'm half self-transcendent. Can't say that I identify with anything in that second part. While I'm not the kind of person who feels like everything must be explained or proven, I am happier when they are. And I'm really not mystical.

Well, the book goes on, but I need to return to my regularly scheduled work. Enjoy!

### **No shoes, no coat, No Problem! (2009-11-19 15:07)**



My kids dislike wearing shoes. And coats. And for the most part, clothes.

That makes getting them out the door in cold weather a bit (ahem) of a challenge.

I've felt rather daunted these last weeks, envisioning the next six months of shoe and coat wearing season. It stretches ahead of me like a dusty road of tears.

So I'm taking a new tactic. I don't want to battle over the little stuff, and I try to pick my battles. So I have decided that Andrew and Sylvia get to choose if and whether they wear coats and shoes. My hope is that by the time it really does get cold enough to be dangerous that they will both decide on their own to wear shoes and it won't be a Mom/Child battle.

So far so good. My kids aren't wearing shoes and coats. (I'm chuckling here.) Yesterday it was raining and 45 degrees, and Andrew went out to the car barefoot with a short-sleeved shirt on. Sylvia doesn't like to wear shoes when we pick up Andrew from preschool, which means that she can't walk, but she's OK with that. She likes her coat because she gets to pull up the hood, which is waaay cool.

My neighbors have witnessed my barefooted kids running about while I am warm in a down coat and had. Argh! Whatever!!!

I've struggled with myself as I've allowed this situation to unfold. But until frostbite is immanent, or until they get whiny about being cold, I'm going to let them be.

So to close, here's a funny exchange between me and my smart little boy yesterday afternoon. I was following his wet footprints as Andrew walked barefoot with no jacket in the nearly freezing weather. I felt rather frustrated:

Me: "Andrew! You know, if you keep walking around barefoot without a jacket in this cold weather, you're going to get sick!"

Andrew: (turns and looks at me quizzically) "No Mom! That's not true. You don't get sick from being cold. You get sick from bad things...like germs. (pause and smile) You're being silly, Mom. (pause and chuckle) I think you're telling me a joke!"

Oh dear, I can't fool my preschooler. Education sure does make it harder to run a dictatorship.

Here's hoping that he's right!

### **Autumn evening hike (2009-11-20 16:50)**

Back when Andrew was in Texas, Bryan, Sylvia, and I went on a hike out on Picnic Point with Jessica, Mitch, Eli, and Celia. It was a stunning day. Warm, gentle, unseasonal, really!



Jessica and I took some pictures of our kiddos playing near (or in Sylvia's case, in) the water. Celia had just turned two, so there are several sweet portraits of our new two-year-old!



So here are some snippets from our time together. More are in the gallery!

















Then on the way home, I had to pull over to take a picture of this amazing sunset. No color processing!



Thanks, Klaboughs, for a lovely time!

**Lovely thoughts (2009-11-24 10:10)**

I received a card in the mail from an organization I support called The Center for Whole Communities.

The card contained some lovely words that I thought I would share with you.

This story is about generosity, and about nourishing one another with what we have.

Honor the strength of relationships above all else  
Love your place  
Be willing to consider the hard questions  
Listen intently  
Invite those you don't know to your table  
Take the time to create something, and to appreciate beauty  
Do less, with more depth and meaning  
Be present with children, without distraction  
Be resilient, and offer healing where you can

This story is told in many different voices and languages, and it is already happening

There are some really good reminders in there. I hope a couple of them touch your heart.





### **Maretta and Kyle's new digs (2009-11-25 07:30)**

My sister, Maretta, and her husband, Kyle have had a bit of a housing adventure this past year.

Last summer, they moved into a house with a couple of friends. They soon started having troubles with their landlord. He didn't fix things (oh, like the hole in the living room wall). Then a couple months ago, they learned that he was getting foreclosed upon, and they would have to move out by March.

So in general, that was pretty not-cool. Then a couple weeks ago, Maretta called me, sounding upset, because they had just learned from another tenant that their landlord had not kept the building up to fire code, had lost his right to lease, and that the building was essentially being condemned...and they would have to be moved out by December 1.

The real knife-twist on that story was that the landlord knew this information back in October but had not seen fit to inform Maretta, Kyle, or their roommates about the situation. So they were all, er, pissed. Maretta made a chocolate chip cheesecake to help work through the stress.

Fortunately, there are apparently quite a few options in St. Paul for four adults and four cats, and last weekend they found a nice house to move into. Here's the email Maretta sent me. It made me smile!

We have a great place to live. It is in Crocus Hill (gorgeous part of St. Paul) a block off Grand (other end of grand than we were living before). It is the second floor of a 4 plex house. It has beautiful crown moldings though out. a wood burning fireplace, a three season porch, a two car garage in back for our use, brand

new kitchen appliances, and a pantry that is to die for. I will try to have a virtual tour ready for you guys to check out on Thanksgiving. I sure will miss seeing everyone. Michael has agreed to come help move after, so yay! Anyway, love and miss you.

Maretta



I'm so happy for them. Sad that they'll be moving the weekend of Thanksgiving so we won't see them, but happy that they will have a lovely new home!



For info on their new mailing address, you can email Maretta at  
[marettakate@gmail.com](mailto:marettakate@gmail.com).

### **Wedding pictures! (2009-11-26 07:19)**

Lisa and Michael had their wedding photos taken by Grey Oaks Photography. After a month of anticipation, they now have their photos available for viewing on an online gallery.

They're great!!

Here are a few of my favorites...









This Thanksgiving, I am thankful for my new sister-in-law!

### **Softly going crazy (2009-11-27 07:53)**

Monday was a bit of a crazy day in my house. It's all faded into the past now, but I thought I should write it down so I don't forget how ridiculous things can get sometimes...

On Monday mornings, Andrew goes to preschool, and Sylvia and I come home and clean the house. This week, I really went all out. After vacuuming, dusting, washing the windows, cleaning the bathroom, mopping the kitchen, emptying the litter boxes, and doing four loads of laundry, I was pooped. I'd also been up past 1am the night before working on a photo order.

And then, Sylvia decided not to take her afternoon nap. So by 3pm, the kids were both a little grouchy, I was out of gas, and thence we began our downward spiral.

Sylvia likes going potty on the toilet. She sometimes is very opinionated about not wearing diapers. On Monday, that was the case in spades. She pulled off diapers faster than I could put them on her. And then she kept peeing on the floor.

We'd get some rags, and she would help me clean it up. Not a big deal - we have hardwood floors - but annoying, especially because hours before the house was so clean. Then she peed on my cashmere blanket.



We tussled, the diaper went on, the diaper came off, and then she came and got me again, "Uh oh, Mommy."



She'd peed on two couch cushions (Where was all this pee coming from?? Did she drink the bathtub??)

I kind of blew my lid. It was like the Rath of Khan. (At least in my brain.)

My first thought was to haul the couch out to the curb. Seriously. Just trash the whole thing. Then I spoke sternly enough to Sylvia (and perhaps it was the crazed look that had come into my eye) that she submitted to a diaper and kept in on the remainder of the evening.

I washed the couch cushions, and I sat down. Bryan was out for the evening, and it was dinner time. I gave the kids cereal and apples with peanut butter. At bedtime, Andrew asked politely for supper. I told him we'd already had it. He informed me that that was a snack, not supper. Too bad, kiddo, Mama was losing her marbles, and what you get in that situation is cereal.

Ahh, fun times, fun times. Sweet memories...

## 5.12 December

### Tigers! (2009-12-01 16:15)

My kids love face paint! Here's a set of pictures of them after a recent face-painting session. Next time, Andrew says they will be pirates. Painted patches, painted beards and scars. Sylvia will be adorable with a little gotee...



You may notice that Sylvia is wearing Andrew's shirt in these pictures. She wears his clothes a great deal of the time.



Yesterday, in fact, she was wearing at least three of his shirts and two pairs of his pants. At the same time.



She really loves her brother.



He loves her too:)



Beware ye who enter our abode. There may be wild creatures lurking about!

**Real tigers (2009-12-02 07:21)**

The weekend before Thanksgiving, we spent an lovely afternoon at the Henry Vilas Zoo. Happily, we ran into some friends there! And we saw the tiger. The amazing, slightly horrifyingly huge tiger.



So beautiful! So close! Run kids!!! Wait, don't run. Hold very still. Think non-prey thoughts.

I am a tree. I am a rock. I'm some nice, boring dirt.



Sylvia was entranced.



The tiger visit here prompted the face painting that I posted pictures from earlier. It's great to be able to take on the role of the mighty beasts you saw at the zoo!







Watching the giraffes on a nice fall day. I love living in a town where I see friends out and about on a regular basis:)  
And Caden and Andrew are good playmates for each other:)



Andrew took a nose-dive into the cement outside the preschool a few days before this photo was taken. The scab has just come off. Poor kid! He got quite a big scrape from that digger.



These boys have gotten so big, and yet they're still so sweet and kind and wonderful.



Andrew's favorite part of the zoo is the playground! He says his favorite part is the lions, but if gauged by amount of time spent, it's definitely the playground:)

Here, he's climbed to the top of a big rock. A not-so-small feat for boy-kind!



## Frankenstein Monday (2009-12-03 07:30)

So. Monday wasn't a great day. Sylvia has been sick (runny nose, feeling cruddy) and she was a bit, er, ahhh, owley.

The following interchange from Young Frankenstein (one of my very favorite movies ever) kinda sums it up. In this scene, Frankenstein is about to go into a room with The Monster, who they have just discovered is violent and unmanageable:

Dr. Frederick Frankenstein: Love is the only thing that can save this poor creature, and I am going to convince him that he is loved even at the cost of my own life.

No matter what you hear in there, no matter how cruelly I beg you, no matter how terribly I may scream, do not open this door or you will undo everything I have worked for.

Do you understand? Do not open this door.

Inga: Yes, Doctor.

Igor: Nice working with ya.

[Dr. Frederick Frankenstein goes into the room with The Monster. The Monster wakes up]

Dr. Frederick Frankenstein: Let me out. Let me out of here. Get me the hell out of here. What's the matter with you people? I was joking! Don't you know a joke when you hear one? HA-HA-HA-HA. Jesus Christ, get me out of here! Open this goddamn door or I'll kick your rotten heads in! Mommy!

Ahhh, just reading that gives me a good chuckle. I was unable to find a clip of this exchange online, but I did find a good Young Frankenstein in 5 minutes clip that was really marvelous.

[EMBED] In other news, my darling daughter is quite improved today. Still runny at the nose, but her mood is back in the manageable realm. Makes for a much nicer day! Brother Michael, I hope you enjoy this post. Writing made me think of you:)

## Demands (2009-12-04 06:56)

When Sylvia was a couple months old, there was a day that I really don't want to forget. One of those Crazy Days. Actually, there are two crazy days I don't want to forget, but I already wrote up one of them here.





Sometimes Sylvia gets really unhappy. It just happens. One day when she was a couple months old, she was really unhappy, and I couldn't find anything to do to help her find a place of calm. Finally I took her outside. It was still quite cold, so I wrapped her up in a blanket, and we sat on the front steps. The sky and trees and air all seemed to help. Her crying lessened.



Meanwhile, Andrew was really wanting my attention. He was watching a movie, and he wanted me to watch it with him. It didn't matter to him if Sylvia cried through it. It was most important that my eyes be fixed to the television. So when I took Sylvia outside, he was worried. He paused the DVD (something he had recently learned



how to do), and he sat on the chair by the front window.

After gesturing to me that I needed to watch the TV, he would set the show playing again. But he was watching me and not the show. As soon as my attention wandered to my crying baby, he'd pause it, gesture wildly, and then re-start when I looked up at the television.

So I was sitting out on the porch (with no coat) on a cold day trying to watch a movie through the window while soothing my sad baby. I remember thinking at the time that it all felt rather surreal. Lots of demands!



Ahh, those first weeks and months of having a new little person in our lives. How long ago it feels! How amazing and wonderful it was. I smile thinking of all the families in the future who will start and grow their families. Such a lovely thing it is. Even when it's crazy.



### **Delicious, delicious! (2009-12-07 15:03)**

I love desserts. If you put butter and sugar and eggs and maybe some flour together, I'll be happy. I love baking and nibbling. In fact, I've discovered (after careful research) that I like the batter or dough better than the cooked version of any baked good. Bread, cookies, pancakes, muffins, cake. I'm actually salivating thinking about it.

I've taken to putting some batter in a little bowl so I can eat it with a spoon while I bake. Mmmm...waffle batter.

I admit that I'm a little off-normal.

Bryan sometimes worries that I'll eat so much batter and there won't be enough of the finished product. And to my credit, I don't think that's ever been the case (partly because when I eat a couple pancakes worth of batter I'm not so hungry for the cooked kind!).

Until yesterday.



Yesterday, I roasted tomatoes with garlic. The intended use of these roasted tomatoes was a sauce for lasagna. I had decided to roast some garlic cloves along with the tomatoes because roasted garlic is one of the best things in the world.

After roasting the tomatoes and garlic with olive oil, diced garlic, and oregano, I stood at the stove and used my teeth to squeeze the soft garlic cloves from their papery shell. Heaven. Then I plucked the tomatoes one by one from the roasting pan and ate them up. Before I knew what happened, I'd eaten half the tray of tomatoes. Then I ate another quarter. It was lunch. Oh, so good.

It might have been a little more civilized to have put the tomatoes on a plate and to have eaten them with bread or to have made some noodles and to have eaten them as a sauce over the noodles, but it was so nice to stand against the warm oven and pluck these little red beauties into my mouth. One by one by one.

Our lasagna had to suffice with a can of crushed tomatoes as its sauce.



Now if you haven't had roasted garlic, I need to help introduce it into your life.

Whenever you are cooking something in the oven, stick some oiled, unpeeled garlic cloves in there. You can either serve them with the meal or use the cook's prerogative to eat them all straight out of the oven. You should probably share some with your spouse. They're too good to keep all to yourself:)



Here's my recipe for roasted tomatoes and garlic:

Use whatever quantities you'd like - a couple bags of grape tomatoes and a head of garlic worked for me

- Halve grape or cherry tomatoes (so they are bite-sized)
- Dice four cloves of garlic
- Separate the rest of the head of garlic but don't peel it
- On a rimmed baking tray, toss the tomatoes with the diced garlic, a teaspoon of oregano, and a couple tablespoons of olive oil
- Use your oily hands to coat the unpeeled garlic cloves with oil and nestle the garlic in the middle of the tray
- Roast the tomatoes and garlic in the oven for 35 minutes at 400 degrees or a lower temp for longer
- When it has cooled, eat with your fingers while standing at the stove. soooo decadent and good....

12-14-09 Update: I made this recipe again with Roma tomatoes, and I wasn't nearly as impressed. I ended up blending up the roasted tomatoes to make a yummy spaghetti sauce. I think the sweetness of the grape tomatoes was a critical component for me!

### **Snow day (2009-12-09 08:14)**

We woke up to a chilly house. Actually, I woke up to woops and squeals and manic giggles from the kids who were about to be given their much-anticipated morning vitamins.

There is loads and loads of snow out our window. I'm guessing 15 inches.

And we've been without power since 3am. I think Bryan and I are going to take turns shoveling. Several neighbors have fire places, so we have places to go warm up if needed.

It's a perfect day for hot coca!! Maybe I'll pull out my camping stove:-)

This post is brought to you by the wonder of the iPhone.









**Snowy pics (2009-12-11 23:24)**

On a recent snowy day, I took a few photos of Sylvia near the light of a window. She is getting to be so big and beautiful!





Silly too.



Spooky was looking for a little love.



The sun is setting by 4pm, and I think I took this photo around 3:30. I love all the lights that my neighbors have stung about their houses. It helps lighten the darkness!





Here are some quick images of our snow-filled street.



Snow-laden bird feeders.



Hope your week was a good one!

### **Cookie baking (2009-12-12 12:25)**

On Wednesday, Madison got an 18 inch snowfall. Yowsers! We got ourselves shoveled out (with the help of our neighbors who actually snow plowed our whole driveway for us!), and by about 10:30am, our electricity came back on. The house never got below 55 degrees, and my hot-blooded kids weren't the least bit phased.

A couple of our neighbors have fire places, and we had plans to spend time with them if the power wasn't restored. In fact, I was kind of looking forward to a slumber party with meals cooked on our (dug out) grills. Nothing beats a warm home and a working stove!

Andrew and I did some cookie-baking on Wednesday afternoon. I love celebrating the Christmas season with my kiddos! I also love eating the almond paste cookie dough that was my mommy's recipe.



This is a new favorite picture of little Sylvie.



And a peek at our view out the window.



If you were here in Wisconsin, I hope your snow day was a lovely one. If you were in a warmer place, enjoy the snowy pictures:)

**Snow play (2009-12-13 09:35)**

Ooops! I just discovered that I never actually posted this post. It was meant to be posted on Dec. 13!

\*\*\*\*\*

Before our big snow fall...when we just had a little snow on the ground...the kids and I went over to Jessica, Eli, and Celia's house for a little snow play. Jessica and I shared the camera, and the we got a bunch of cute pictures of the kids before some of them melted down completely.

See Celia's sweet tears? So lovely on those cheeks.



Andrew and Sylvia. I couldn't get Sylvia to keep her mittens on.





Jessica got this great shot of Eli jumping. What a picture!



Boy in flight.





Celia hams it up and shows off the fabulous hat that her mommy made for her.



Snow fight!



Boys throwing snow balls.



Cold girls. Soon after this picture, I took Celia and Andrew inside, but Eli and Sylvia had fun playing with Jessica's dog  
1050

and running about in the snow for a while longer. In this photo, Sylvia is now wearing my gloves, which were highly preferable to her own.



### **Inspiring (2009-12-14 14:18)**

I follow about sixty blogs. That sounds like a lot! Fortunately, only about 30 of those blogs update regularly. The other 30 are like little happy cards in my mailbox when there's a new post. Twenty or more of the blogs are photography-related. It's wonderful to look at and read the inspiring work of others!

Sometimes I weed down my blog-roll by paying attention to which blogs I choose to read first. The ones I consistently read last get nixed. One of my favorite blogs...usually the first one I click on after opening Google Reader...is the NieNie Dialogues. Stephanie Nielson lives in Salt Lake City. A bit over a year ago, she was in a horrible plane crash. She survived, but barely. And she's had a rough road healing (she was burned over 80 % of her body). She's the mother of four children, and she has candidly shared the challenges of reconnecting with them and regaining her role of Mom. Plus, she's cute and funny and touching. And her challenges make almost anything in my world look like a cake walk.

This morning I read the second of a two-part story written about her in the Arizona Republic. Even having followed her situation for the last year, this article rocked my world. It's beautifully written. And touching and inspiring. I mean, if this woman can find the hope and strength and humor to travel the path she's been on, I should really be able to look past even the crummiest of days to relish the ups and downs of my little world.



Climbing Back - Story by Jaimee Rose | Photos by Cheryl Evans

So if you have a moment (or several moments), take a look at this story. After you've read that, you'll probably want to keep track of Stephanie. Her blog, the NieNie Dialogues is here.

Let me know what you think. And also, let me know what your favorite blogs are? Who do you read who is funny? Or has good recipes? Or fun craft ideas? Or just puts a smile on your face? I love to find new good reads!

### **Linzer squares (2009-12-16 13:58)**

Today was Andrew's last day of preschool for the year. It really snuck up on me! In fact, as I was getting him ready to go this morning, I realized that we had no holiday gift for his teacher, and I had a moment of panic. I envision myself as a mom who comes to the holiday party bearing some cute, homemade gift for the teachers. Ideally wrapped up in some cute, thoughtful package. Aaak! Reality strikes!

But then I remembered that my sweet husband had made a batch of Linzer squares last night while I was on the computer a-workin' on photos. Linzer squares are one of his favorite holiday cookies, and they've always been a fixture in my understanding of what December is all about.



So quick as a flash, I put together a couple plates of Linzer squares and the peppermint fudge Andrew and Sylvia helped me make yesterday. Voila. I get to maintain the illusion that I have my act together:) Thanks, hon! Oh, and I've been, uhhh, nibbling on ones remaining in the pan. I think there are a few left. Come home soon, Bryan!

My mom gave these Linzer squares as gifts to our teachers every year. Some of my teachers from Pumpkin Hollow may still remember them since they got them for so many years! The dough is an almond-paste dough, and it's so good I could just eat it for breakfast lunch and dinner. Mind you, I would never actually do that. It just sounds like a really good idea. really goood.

We also use this dough for making our sugar cookies. One batch of the recipe makes enough dough for a tray of Linzer squares and enough frosted cookies to keep you busy for a while. Andrew and I frosted our cookies last weekend. He's developed a very

nice frosting technique.





I could always tell which were his cookies because they were a little more creative with the sprinkles than mine.



Growing up, we often made Christmas cookies the week between Christmas and New Years. My mom liked to spread out the holiday fun, and didn't like trying to fit everything into the pre-Christmas craze. So if you haven't made your cookies yet, you could try the Mom Babler timing.

Straight from my mom's kitchen (and the November 1980 edition of Family Circle), here's the recipe for her  
1054



Christmas cookie dough.

Basic Sugar Cookie Dough

1 lb butter, softened (4 sticks)

2 cups sugar

2 8oz. cans of almond paste

4 eggs

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla

6 1/2 (ish) cups of flour (sifted)

1 1/4 teaspoon salt

Beat the butter and sugar. Crumble in the almond paste. Beat until very smooth. Add the four eggs and the vanilla. Mix in the flour and the salt.

Break into four balls, cover each in plastic wrap.

At this point, you can freeze the dough for quite some time. I often make the dough a few weeks before baking the cookies. If you do freeze it, let it thaw in the refrigerator before proceeding.

If you want to go straight in to baking, refrigerate the dough balls for one hour.

To make sugar cookies, roll out the dough and cut, chilling the dough intermittently if necessary. Bake for 10-12 minutes at 375. Mom noted that you should watch carefully for a bit of one of the cookies on the corner of the tray to turn golden and then take them out. This year, I think mine were only in the oven for 8 or 9 minutes. Cool. Frost with a mixture of whipping cream and powdered sugar with a touch of vanilla and a sprinkle of salt.

\*\*\*\*

To make Linzer Squares, you need two of the chilled balls (half the recipe).

Grease a jelly roll pan. Lay down waxed paper. Grease the waxed paper. Press one quarter of the dough recipe into the pan. Spread a cup of raspberry jam (with seeds!) on the dough crust.

Roll out the second ball of dough, and with a pastry pinking sheers (mom had a rolling one, I have a flat one) cut strips. Lay them out like a lattice on the top of the jelly (weaving not necessary). Brush with beaten egg if you want (I don't). Bake at 375 for 12-15 minutes.



Enjoy!

### **900 posts (2009-12-21 15:16)**

That's right folks, this is my 901st blog post. I've been at it since May '05. I post sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, sometimes hourly:) Four-and-a-half years. I should hit the big 1,000 sometime in 2010!

I wrote my first post on Friday, May 20, 2005. One month before little Andrew was born. A few days before my mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Wow. As my website got up and rolling, it became a way to share news about our little Andrew as well as a really helpful tool for sharing info on Mom's health with her many circles of concerned family and friends.

It's interesting to scroll through the "monthly archives" to see my life's headlines from the last 55 months.

Looking back/looking ahead. I smile when I ponder what 2010 will bring!

This month has been soooooo filled. I love to be busy. I thrive on activity and to-do lists and deadlines and schedules. But as of December 21, I'm feeling a little tired and over-clocked and ready for a break. Good thing we have one coming up!

I've been preparing lots and lots of photo orders for clients this month, and with this in addition to my normal gift-making and Christmas card writing, I've been staying up until nearly 1am every night this month. Somehow, I haven't been tired, but I am starting to feel like there's a bit of gauze separating me from the world. A little fuzzy, you might say. Oh, and where did I put my keys?

...

Meanwhile, Andrew and Sylvia are loving all the magic of the holidays. Andrew is really enjoying the advent calendars and the crafts and the baking and the decorations. And Sylvia is enjoying following along after Andrew and doing just exactly everything that he's doing ! It's easy to be in the holiday spirit when you've got little ones around!



We're off to Texas soon. Happy holidays!

**Merry Christmas! (2009-12-24 23:08)**

Bright and warm Christmas wishes to all my friends and family near and far! I'm attaching here the photos from my Christmas card and our 2009 Christmas letter. I hope your holiday is safe and joyful and filled with the people you love.





December 2009

Dear Friends and Family,

It's been a full year here in the Dotzour household! The days and months fly by...though sometimes the minutes pass verrry slowly.

I was startled to realize that on January 1 this year, our little Sylvia was only 10 months old. And now, here she is almost two. Our crawling, squalling baby has turned into a running, climbing, speaking toddler before our eyes! That girl! She's a delight and a handful and a dimpled firecracker. She's gregarious and charming and filled to the brim with passion. These days, she and Andrew are playing together as good buddies, and their giggles (and occasional howls) echo through our home.

Andrew is four-and-a-half, and he's sweet and goofy and earnest and loving. Early this year, Andrew cultivated a fascination with writing letters and words, and over the course of the year, he's become an avid reader. What a world this opens for him! My heart fills up when I watch him read books to Sylvia. Such a sweet guy he is. Andrew has been going to preschool three mornings a week at Monona Grove Nursery School. I can't believe that next fall he'll be in kindergarten!

Bryan continues to enjoy his work developing software at OpGen. They are inventing a process to make optical maps of bacterial DNA, which could in the future help doctors identify when patients have antibiotic-resistant infections. Hopefully they'll make some big strides in the upcoming year! When he's not working hard at OpGen, Bryan's usually found playing with the kiddos or playing chess online or at tournaments.

Over the last several years, I have spent an inordinate amount of time working on photos and my website. This summer, with a lot of support from Bryan, I launched a photography business so I could spend even more time working on photos and a business website! Running my own business has been an amazing experience. I specialize in lifestyle portraits of kids and families, and on weekend mornings, you'll often find me running and crawling around with my camera after young ones. My mom had a passion for natural light photography of children...she even had business cards made...so it feels good to be developing a profession that was dear to her.

2009 is making a postcard finish with the eighteen inch snowfall we got last week. I hope your Christmas celebration is merry and bright and that you find peace and contentment in 2010.

With much love,

Althea, Bryan, Andrew, and Sylvia

To keep up-to-date with our daily joys and crazy moments, check out [dotzourfamily.com](http://dotzourfamily.com). I just wrote my 900<sup>th</sup> post! For more info on my new business, visit [altheadotzourphotography.com](http://altheadotzourphotography.com)

### **Christmas Eve! (part one) (2009-12-25 14:56)**

I took a couple days away from my laptop, and it felt really nice.

We're here in Texas, and we're having just a lovely time. We flew in on Wednesday, and the kids were ever so excited to see Granny and Grandad and their Aunt Melanie. I've uploaded photos from our Christmas eve and our Christmas morning to my website, but on this post, I'll limit myself to some favorite pics from Christmas eve.

Bryan's mom has the house just beautifully decorated. And Sylvia (and Andrew too) did an amazing job at not touching the presents or the breakable decorations. My little girl is growing up!

The tree and the mantel are lit and lovely. Especially with some soft Christmas music playing and the smells of supper wafting in from the kitchen!





Sylvia has been a happy girl here at Granny and Grandad's. She's made herself quite at home and loves playing with the kitchen and all the special toys that Granny has here at her house.



Like this castle that used to be Bryan and Melanie's. It's so fun to play with the toys that used to be theirs!



Playing with Dad. Such a happy girl she's been!



Grandad and Andrew put together puzzles in the dining room.





Granny is working in the kitchen making a poblano cheese soup for our Christmas Eve dinner. Mmmmmmm good!



Kicking back on Christmas Eve.



Andrew runs to put his note for Santa on the fire place. He wrote, "Hi Santa. I am writing a journal. I wish to for presents."



Melanie and Grandad watching a home video of baby Bryan.



The pretty Christmas tree in the dining room...reflected in the china cabinet.



I ran outside while we were eating dinner to get some pictures of the house.





Look at that nice family eating their Christmas Eve dinner. It was cold outside (35 degrees!), so I ran back in to warm up with soup and pumpkin bread!



Sylvia was having fun looking through some glasses that make lights look like they have snowflakes around them.



Here are Bryan and Melanie being goofy



Ohh, there's lots more...I'm going to split this into two posts!

**Christmas Eve (part deux) (2009-12-25 15:16)**

On Christmas Eve, Bryan's parents (or some mysterious gift giver) give everyone Christmas pjs. It's such fun to anticipate what they'll be! More pics are available in the photo gallery.

Here's Sylvia opening up her box of pjs.



Andrew looks at some photos that Granny was taking of him in his new jams.



The kids posing from some Christmas eve jammie photos.



Andrew hugs Sylvia. She indicates that she feels like she is being strangled.





Here are Granny and Grandad with their little grandkids.



Here's me and Bryan with our wacky kids... One of my favorite pictures of the year.



Andrew has his cookies ready for Santa.



Sylvia dances around in her new pjs. She was sooo excited!





Delivering the cookies to the fire place.



Leaving the cookies at the fireplace. Moments later, Sylvia completely broke down because she thought they were going to eat the cookies, and when Andrew told her "no," it broke her heart a little.



The native Dotzours in their Christmas jams.



Here's our candy cane and flannel-clad crew:)



### **Christmas morning in Texas (2009-12-26 09:39)**

On Christmas morning, the kids waited until almost 7am to wake up. They were excited, but not over-the-top. Gleeful:)

When Andrew came out to the living room, he jumped up on the fire place and was so amazed to see that the stockings had been filled overnight. And Someone had eaten the cookies, leaving only crumbs!

Sylvia's favorite part of gift unwrapping is pulling off the bows. After that, she's pretty much on to the next thing. Andrew got some pirate gear, and we all got musical instruments.

My album of Christmas morning pictures is available [here](#).

Here Andrew has just rushed into the room and opened his first present.





Handing out some presents to Sylvia...



Sylvia got a baby doll. Granny made little quilts for both Andrew and Sylvia's dolls out of adorable '50s fabrics. Look at how my sweet girl is tending to her baby.



Christmas morning 2009...



Each stocking contained a rice krispy treat snowman popsicle. Sylvia loved them and ate several...



Me lounging on a lovely Christmas morning.



Oh dear. We've got a pirate in the house!





A pirate with a hook!



Two pirates!! This one I call Red Beard. I think he's a hot hot pirate.



Andrew and Sylvia are entranced by Veggie Tale's The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything.



The big kids are doing a scavenger hunt. Such fun!



A clue hidden behind a 1986 plate decorated by Bryan.



Trying to discern the solution...



Cheers, everyone! Happy Christmas!! I hope yours was a grand one:)





## Painting clay...and faces (2009-12-27 07:03)

A week ago, Andrew and Sylvia sat down to paint some clay items they'd made. The phone rang just after we started. When I looked back at Sylvia, I found that she'd gotten creative with her choice of canvases.



I couldn't decide if I should stop her or just let her keep going. It's all non-toxic and washable!



Andrew's jazzed about his artwork!





Colorful snakes and a star.



My artist at work.



My other artist cleaning up.



Here were a few pictures I was taking with the potential of being Christmas card pics.



I guess that Andrew's arm around her neck must feel to Sylvia like a bit of a strangle...



Kaleb and Karin, we love the hats you sent!



### **Christmas at home (2009-12-28 07:45)**

Bryan and I had a few gifts we were planning on giving the kids before we left. But we kept forgetting to set it up. Finally on December 21, we decided to have a little Christmas in Madison. Granny and Grandad had sent Sylvia a beautiful high chair and some great wooden blocks for Andrew. We got them a few books.

Here's some pictures from our Monday morning Christmas (see more in the gallery here)...





















Christmas with kiddos is so much fun!

### **Dallas trip - SANS kids! (2009-12-30 21:41)**

Bryan and I are back in College Station tonight after spending a few days up in Dallas without our kiddos. On Monday, Bryan and I drove up to Dallas (it's about 3 hours) so we could beat the snow/ice/muck that was predicted for Tuesday. We spent the afternoon wandering around the Galleria...a fancy schmancy super-mall with an ice skating rink in the middle.

Then Monday evening, we headed over to my uncle Kirk and aunt Sue's house. Kirk is my mom's little brother, and I had't been to his home prior to this trip. We had a great evening together:) We started out with dinner at a restaurant that serves a sushi buffet (Osaka Sushi), and then we headed back to his place where the boys played the Wii and the girls looked at clothes. Overall, it was a fun and happy opportunity to see some lovely people, and I think back on it with a smile. Kirk and Sue, thanks for hosting us on short notice and for giving us such a nice time!

On Tuesday morning, Bryan and I took the train from Plano to downtown Dallas and spent several hours walking around the amazing Dallas Aquarium. I was sooo impressed at the layout and the exhibits and the beautiful birds and fishies they had on display. My favorite critter was the three-toed sloth. It pulled back from its branch and peered right into my eyes/camera lens for several long moments. I feel like I was inspected by an alien! My photos of manatees, toucans, and sea anemones can be found in this photo album.

We met up with Melanie on Tuesday afternoon just before snow started falling with big, thick, fluffy flakes. Stores closed almost immediately. They aren't accustomed to wintery weather here in Texas:) We ate a late lunch at an amazingly good restaurant called Gorden Biersch. So many key words in their menu...and the Doppelbock beer that Bryan ordered was delish. I say that as someone who doesn't like beer-but I kept snitching sips because it was so good!

Since the weather outside was frightful, we spent some happy hours playing cards and watching the Wisconsin Badgers bowl game in the warmth of Mel's apartment. Then we headed out for a yummy supper at Melanie's favorite restaurant, La Hacienda Ranch. Two margaritas makes me feel quite happy. That and two days spent without the responsibilities of parent-hood, and Bryan and I were feeling foot loose and fancy free.



We celebrated our lack of responsibilities by going to the 10:45pm showing of the movie Avatar. And what a movie it was! We saw it in IMAX 3D, and I can easily state that I've never seen anything like it before in my life. It was visually stunning. Magical. Spectacular. I got lucky and dreamed I was one of the People all night.

We all slept until almost 10, which seemed the perfect way to celebrate not having Andrew and Sylvia around. After poking around town a bit and enjoying a good lunch, Bryan and I said goodbye, hopped back in the car, and headed back down to College.

It was so nice to see our kids! There's nothing in the world like being apart from them for a while to make me delight in their little selves all the more.

Tonight, Bryan and his dad are playing chess, LuAnn is reading a new book on Norman Rockwell, and I'm sharing stories with anyone who is interested in listening. Melanie drives back down tomorrow, and we'll all get to celebrate new year's eve and day together before we fly back home on Saturday.

Hope your week has been a relaxing one!

### **Slothful New Year! (2009-12-31 08:57)**

Happy New Year's Eve!

I'd like to share some comprehensive reflections on 2009, but that would take brain power, and I don't feel like it. I'm on vacation after all! I feel slothful. Just like my friend sloth from the Dallas Aquarium.

So instead of looking back at 2009, let's just look back at some pictures from earlier this week, shall we. And since I'm feeling slothful, let's start with my friend the sloth.



I loved this sloth. He/she/it looked into my eyes, and I think it did a brain scan on me.



Oh, my was it an amazing creature. It wasn't in a cage...just in a tree that you could walk around and under. The only thing that kept you from touching the sloth was your good manners. What an experience!



I loved this three-toed sloth, and I'd like to have more sloths like it in my life. What do you think about trying to position my photography business to give me a regular sloth-fix. I could bill myself as, "Althea Dotzour Photography - natural light lifestyle portraits - babies, children, families, sloths."



The aquarium was chocker-block full of stunning birds. Made me feel like pulling out my binos and doing some bird watching again this spring!

Below, you'll find a lizard. He's in sharp focus because he sat veerrry still. Thank you for posing, Mr. Lizard.



I'd never seen a manatee before. It made my breath catch in my throat. All those years when I was a kid and wanting to "save the manatees!", and here we're standing right in front of them.





This aquarium had it all! There was also a huge shark tank complete with underwater tunnel (not shown).



These anemones now make me think of the movie Avatar. Wow. Was that a beautiful movie.



This orange fishy was sitting on the floor of his tank, making it easy to photograph him. Thanks, bud! These sea horses blew my mind.



Next, please enjoys some assorted fishies.





And finally, a farewell with a flock of flamingos.



Happy end-of-2009 to you! I hope your 2010 is a joyful one!

# 6. 2010

## 6.1 January

### Reflections and Goals (2010-01-01 13:34)

One of my favorite blogs, SimpleMom, is big into planning. Works well for me since I'm big into planning too. Last January, I used her reflection and goal-setting questions to help me make plans for 2009. It worked pretty well, and I've just made Word documents of her 2010 questions that I'm hoping to start filling in today.

In case you're interested in stepping back and doing some big-picture thinking, here's Tsh's 2009 Reflection Questions, her 2010 goal-setting questions, and a good post she did on setting financial goals. Just so you know, I have no intention of answering every question. There are too many!! But I do find it useful to step back and think broadly and then to force myself to think forward and to do some planning about my life and my family and my finances.

What do you think? Do you like to set personal goals? Business goals? Family or financial goals? Or does the whole thing give you the heebiejeebees and make you want to climb back in bed and wait for 2011? Different strokes for different folks:)

If you have any resources or suggestions or comments, let me know!

We're enjoying a sunny Texas January 1. Right now, Sylvie is sleeping, I'm typing, and the rest of the fam is curled up together watching some football. Hope your January 1 is off to a good start!

### Help me pick some good reads! (2010-01-02 09:53)

As part of my 2010 goal setting, I was thinking about what books I hope to read in 2010. While I have a long list of photography books I plan to read, I realized that I have no fun books on the docket for the next year. Help! This is not good!

So I turned to Chinaberry, a wonderful children's bookseller who also often has good ideas for adult reads. Here's my picks from them so far:

- The Expected One by Kathleen Mcgowan
- Fieldwork by Mischa Berlinski
- The Flying Troutmans by Miriam Toews
- The Gift of an Ordinary Day by Katrina Kenison
- House of Daughters by Sarah-kate Lynch

- The Wednesday Sisters by Meg Clayton

Looking back at the books that were recommended last summer but that I haven't yet read:

Love the One You're With by Emily Giffin

Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Trail of Crumbs: Hunger, Love, and the Search for Home by Kim Sunee

The Middle Place by Kelly Corrigan

Sweetness in the Belly by Camilla Gibb

I Love You, Beth Cooper by Larry Doyle

The History of Love by Nicole Krauss

Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon

Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse by Lousie Erdrich

Eat, Pray, Love by Elizabeth Gilbert

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver

If anyone has other suggestions or an "Oh, read this one first!" comment, please let me know. As for myself, looking back at 2009, my favorite book was probably A Homemade Life by Molly Wizenberg. I drool when I think of it. And when I got to the end, I was sad, sad, sad.

I look forward to hearing what you recommend!

### **January day at home (2010-01-08 14:40)**

As you may have guessed, our family of four made it home from Texas:) We flew back home last Saturday. It was sad to leave Granny and Grandad's home, and frankly, even after 11 days, I wasn't really looking forward to the end of the vacation. However, happily, when we got back into our sweet little house and spent some time with our kitties and all the many little things that make our home the cozy nest that it is, I found I was indeed quite happy to be back.

I still have a few pictures from our visit on my camera. And, bizarrely, I haven't picked up my camera since we returned. That's nearly one week. No blogging and no photography for a week! I haven't gone that long between blog posts since June! I question whether my name is actually Althea nothing Dotzour.

The simple answer is that I was reading books. And when I read books, well, it's a good thing that the house stays standing, because my attention does not waver from the task at hand. I kept wishing that someone would show up to sweep the kitchen floor or take that load of laundry out of the dryer or feed my children. Sometimes I love taking care of the home. And sometimes I feel like reading or working or photographing or blogging. These days, I love doing anything that involves a cup of hot coca, a blanket, and a child or cat or computer on my lap.

I've been reading business books because I'm spending the next few months really focusing on my photography business. I read The E-Myth, Hug Your Customer, Building Your Photography Business, and Trade-Off. So many great ideas and suggestions to work on! I love managing and imagining my business!

Andrew and Sylvia are thriving. Andrew had a wonderful, wonderful time in Texas. And Sylvia is talking up a



storm, is now going around during the day without her pacifier, and has joined in our family adventures to an increasingly great degree.

Yesterday, the kids and I had our first Music Together class at Happy Bambino. Since HB just moved their store down the street from our house, and since it had snowed a lot the night before, I thought it would be fun to pull the kids on their sleds to our music class. Well, it was indeed a charming idea. But I learned that Andrew is as heavy as a boulder on a sled and Sylvia won't keep her mittens on...resulting in very cold hands and a very sad girl. I was huffing and puffing and sweating as I trudged down the street like some sort of draft horse. Andrew walked along, wandering into people's yards, and getting stuck in snow drifts. We were late, which took away some of the charm of the endeavor, and I laughed to myself to think how much more fun things sometimes sound or look in retrospect than as you're doing it.

On the way home, Sylvia decided she would be happy to keep my mittens on her hands, and she and Andrew played in the snow for nearly an hour as we slowly made our way home. That afternoon, worn out from all the fun, I took a nap.

Today is snowy and chilly, but we have nowhere to go. Sylvia isn't napping. In fact, right now she's in her crib saying "Wanna pay (play)!" Then she's saying "Pleph!" Which means that she's wanting to spit out her paci into the paci jar so she can get out of her crib and play!

Hope your early January is off to a good start! We're enjoying the crispness of the new year and the coziness that winter weather brings.

### **Workin' at Andrew's preschool (2010-01-14 15:37)**

I'm on the board of directors for Andrew's preschool. It's been such a positive experience - being involved in running a stellar non-profit organization again. I am the treasurer, so I spend lots of time thinking about numbers and taxes and administration. And at the end of the day when I've worked a lot, I feel all warm and content inside.

Monona Grove Nursery School is such a lovely school. It's sweet and gentle, and I really enjoy working with the teachers.

I had several projects with the school that I've been working on over the last week. They've taken a lot of time. In general, I find that even when I'm busy with other tasks that my need to write and share means that I write a blog post nearly every day. However, this month, I've felt a little less motivated. Besides, a lot of my to-do items have people waiting to get the results. And as far as I know, no one except me is sad when there's no blog post on a given day.

So we'll see...I liked writing posts daily in 2009, and I'm trying to decide what a good goal for 2010 should be. Let me know if you have suggestions:)



Sylvia's many faces (2010-01-15 07:37)



Have you gotten a load of my daughter recently? She's talking! She's starting to put together words...sometimes linking two or three in cute little Sylvie sentences. Her pronunciation is sometimes a little hard to catch, and she's adding more words to her vocabulary every day. Sometimes when she isn't understood, she get a little furious.



Also, this past month, Andrew and Sylvia have begun playing together a lot. They are having so much fun!! (except when they're not) These days when I'm cooking or busy with something, it's not uncommon to hear the two of them stampeding up and down the halls and cackling with laughter.

There's a lot of hiding together (in closets especially) and then laughing together in the dark. Sylvia revels in her big brother's attention, and he seems delighted to have discovered that his little sister can be a real playmate now.



Andrew's reading so well these days, and I just love it when he reads to Sylvia or me or to his friends. I should post a video so as to share the sweetness!



Now that Sylvia's language skills are blooming, she's saying some adorable thing. Like when she says quietly to herself, "Daddymydaddymydaddymydaddy." Or when she looks at Andrew with big, tear-filled eyes and says, "Hep pease." And then he asks her what's wrong, and he helps her. Miraculous!

We've been watching home videos from when Andrew was two, and the sweet way that he talked is almost too much to bear. So we went out and bought more tapes so we can be sure to capture Sylvia's adorable lilt and funny inflections. By the way, she calls our cat Spooky, "Ookys" just like Andrew did.

Thank heavens they are so cute. I made the gross mistake of trying to stop at a store to (get this!) buy a pair of pants with my children. At nap time. It didn't go well. Good thing the store was mostly empty and the clerks seemed somehow charmed by how Sylvia chased Andrew around the store, screaming and crying as he giggled and laughed and ran faster. Yeah. Clothes shopping for myself with two kids in tow - that's going to go in the "not a good idea" column. On the plus side, I did find a great pair of pants and a shirt. Merry Christmas to me!





Photos from sunny Texas (2010-01-16 08:07)



I have a whole album full of photos from our Texas visit that I haven't posted yet. We had such a nice time!

Here are some of my favorite pics. Nearly all of them were taken by Bryan's mom or dad.

When we arrived, Andrew and Sylvia were excited to find that they each had a cookie, a box of crayons, and some Christmas coloring books at their table. They sat right now and got to work!



Here's Bryan and Mel...



Grandad and Andrew on Christmas Eve.



Sylvia tends to her new baby doll on Christmas morning.



Bryan and Andrew doing one of their favorite games: chess puzzles



Bryan and Andrew playing with Andrew's new stacking game (Grace, we got the idea when we visited you!)





Granny reads to her grandkiddos.



These animals get some major use! They had whole communities built for them, and then they started engaging in strange stacking behaviors.



Andrew snuggling with his Aunt Mel



Grandad and Sylvia play with vintage Little People. How many can she fit on her fingers?



It wasn't particularly warm during most of our visit, but on the days that the sun came out, we all basked in the back yard. Love those piggies!



Andrew seemed to enjoy himself.





Soaking up some sunshine.



Oops! Sylvia got it in her head that she wanted to be naked, and while it was only 50 degrees or so, she was perfectly content to play outside in the nude.



Oh, and we played lots of games in the evening. Poker, buckskin, Lost Cities...it's always fun to play games!



I think I've caught-up on photos. Now I just need to pick up my camera again so I have some photos of January to share!

Hope you're having a good day!

**Paperwhites for your desktop (2010-01-17 10:15)**





Before Christmas, I planted a few paperwhite bulbs in a bowl in my kitchen. When we got home from Texas, we found that our bulbs had sprouted long, green stalks. Then last week, the blooms started to appear, filling the air of our home with their peppery, sharp spring sent.

There's nothing in all the world like blooming bulbs. They just sing of hope. And spring. Or at least of spring in one's heart!

The flowers are now at their peak of bloom, and every time I walk past them, their sent makes me look up sharply and then smile.

I took a photo of the very first paperwhite bloom, and I now have it as my desktop background. How I wish that my monitor had a scratch-and-sniff function:)

I thought maybe you'd like to share in the prettiness. If you'd like to download an image for your desktop, click here for the 1026x768 (standard) size or here for the 1440x900 (wide screen) size. You can right-click the link and choose "save link as," or you can click on the link, wait for the photo to pop up, and right click on the photo and choose "save as." Enjoy!

### **Andrew's declarations of love (2010-01-27 12:34)**

My four-year-old son has such a loving heart. With his little impish smile and twinkling, adoring eyes, he regularly melts my heart with declarations of his love. For example, this morning he was snuggling with his dad in the bed, and he said, ""Dad, I love you so much I could hug the whole world."

He also regularly says, "Daddy, I love you so much my heart is going to explode." Or, "I love you so much, I can't even stand it!" Or I love you all the way to P3 (the lowest floor of the parking garage in Terry's condo)." Or of course, the classic, "I love you, Nunu (his completely made up term of endearment), up to the moon!"

He bends down and talks to Sylvia in a staccato, sing-songy, baby voice, "Hi Syl-vee-aaahh. How are youuu-uuu, ba-beee?" "I love you Syl-vee-ahhh."

Moments later, they're throwing books or blocks at each other, but then one of them giggles and glances sideways at the other, and before you know it, the tears and yelling is transformed into ruckus giggles and the pounding of little bare feet as they dash about the house to hide or find a new game, or just to fill the time with their important discoveries. Oh, and they are both usually naked. 'Cuz that's how my kids roll.

It's a good thing that they are so cute. It's a critical form of self-preservation.

I feel so lucky to have them in my life, and I feel so grateful that they are mine. Andrew's declarations of love are amazing feedback in a job (parenting) that doesn't always involve a lot of direct positive feedback. When my boy goes to bed at night, he likes me to be the one to tuck him in and talk about our day. Every night, he says, "You know the one who is going to put me to bed tonight? The one whose closest to me!" I'm always the one closest. Bryan asked if he couldn't do it some day, and Andrew told him he could do it on the 4th of July. So they put it on the calendar. Bryan's looking forward to it:)

Ahh, those kids. I love em!

### **The Gift of an Ordinary Day (2010-01-29 11:05)**

I'm on an airplane right now flying to the west, and I'm reveling in the luxury of sitting alone, reading a book.

This book, *The Gift of an Ordinary Day* by Katrina Kenison is so good that I have to share it right \*now\* even though it means thumb-typing this post on my phone.

I may not have mentioned it recently, but these last couple weeks, my kids have been driving me crazy. Sylvia has been sick and has been throwing A LOT of tantrums. Andrew and I spent a couple days last week in an embroiled battle of wills. The house has gotten too messy, the weather has been cold, and there were a couple afternoons that I was ready to throw in the towel. Except that when your job is Mom, it's not clear how to announce that you're giving notice.

Of course, in and amidst the crying and the disobedience and the mess, there were lovely times. And even more fortunately, I have a strong amnesia about hard times, so next week I'll probably only have a vague sense that things were anything but grand.

So here I sit on an airplane with a book I picked up at the library last night. Katrina Kennison's book *Mitten Strings for God* is about my favorite parenting books ever. Her writing is like a balm for my mommy soul. The book currently on my lap is *The Gift of an Ordinary Day*, and it's about her experiences shifting from being a parent of little kids to being the parent of teens.

I'm not a big crier, but I've sat here on the plane, sobbing over several paragraphs. Her first book was all about slowing down and soaking up the pleasures of everyday life with our kids. This book is about searching and changing and letting go as her little boys grow into teenagers and men.

Here are a few of the passages that cracked open my heart:

About looking back at parenting small kids:

"I learned a lot about myself, and many lessons in mindfulness, during those long days. Intense and demanding as they are, the years we spend with our young children can also be deeply, viscerally gratifying. We know exactly where we are needed and what we need to be doing. Immersed in the physical and emotional realm of parenthood. We develop reserves of patience, imagination, and fortitude we never dreamed possible. At times, the hard work of being a mother seems in itself a spiritual practice, an opportunity for growth and self-exploration in an extraordinarily intimate world, a world in which hands are for holding, bodies for snuggling, laps for sitting."

She goes on to talk about how her boys have grown up, and the oldest is in eighth grade...

"Sensing the ground shifting beneath my feet, I resisted this new, unknown territory, already nostalgic for what I'd so recently taken for granted. I missed my old world and its funny inhabitants, those great big personalities still housed in small, sweet bodies. I missed my sons, kissable cheeks and round bellies, their unanswerable questions, their innocent faith, their sudden tears and wild, infectious giggles, even the smell of their morning breath as they would leap, upon waking, from their own warm beds directly into ours. I missed the person I has been for them too—the younger, more capable mother who read aloud for hours, stuck raisin eyes into bear-shaped pancakes, created knight's armor from cardboard and duct tape. Certainly my talents didn't seem quite so impressive anymore, my company not as desirable as it once had been."

This chapter in her book is about change, and she goes on:

"Change, it is said, goes hand in hand with opportunity. Growing older, I begin to see that finding fulfillment in this next stage of life will demand a kind of surrender that seems beyond me now, a new way of being and caring that I can barely begin to imagine. I suspect I have a lot to learn about letting go.

"I recall my younger, intensely ambitious self with a wince—how avidly I set my sights on the future and how hard I worked at becoming the person I thought I ought to be, in pursuit of the life by which I thought I could define myself. So many aspirations—for a rewarding career, security for my family, success for my children, a marriage that worked, and a life that mattered. I wanted it all. And I believed that if I nurtured those dreams, and planned well enough, they would one day come true. The funny thing is, now, as my children begin to pull away, it is the present moment that concerns me most. Yet try as I might to pay attention, I find myself confronted with all sorts of conflicting emotions—pride in my sons, of course, and gratitude for what we've had, but also an almost heartbreaking sense of just how short life really is, and how incomprehensible. How in fact life is not all about planning and shaping, but about not knowing, and being okay with that. It's about learning to take the moment that comes and make the best of it, without any idea of what's going to happen next."

Ahhh good stuff. I'm so glad that this nook found its way to my lap!

Now I'm going to sign off, keep reading, and enjoy a three day weekend with some wonderful friends.

Lovingly,

Althea

## 6.2 February

### More from The Gift of an Ordinary Day (2010-02-01 19:37)

I had a great time on my western trip. Thanks to Bryan for caring for the kids (one of whom threw up all night) so I could go have fun for the weekend!

I finished the book *The Gift of an Ordinary Day* by Katrina Kenison, and it was so good! It really made me step back and acknowledge that while some of the hours and weeks of tending to small children can feel endless that this is a finite and precious time. Here are some more quotes I just had to share:

The hardest part of being a parent may be learning to live with the fact that there are so many things that we simply can't control, so much of the journey that is not our doing at all, but rather the work of the gods, the unfolding of destiny, fate. We give birth to our children, we love and cherish them, but we don't form or own them, any more than we can own the flowers blooming at our doorsteps or the land upon which we build our homes and invest our dreams. We may tend the garden for a while, take our brief turn upon the land, nurture the children delivered into our arms, but in truth we possess none of these things, nor can we write any life story but our own. It's a truth I had to confront right away, one that I'm still still struggling to accept seventeen years later.

and later

Now, all these years later, as one son prepares to enter high school and the other, unbelievably, to leave it, I often find myself thinking back to the years when they were both still small. Summer days then began with pancakes and just-picked blueberries for breakfast and might end with made-up stories or shadow pictures on a bedroom wall. In between, there were walks to the creek, picnic lunches on the back porch, stacks of books carried out to a quilt on the grass, a plastic wading pool that could enchant two little boys for hours, a shallow red dish full of filmy bubble liquid, and the magic wand that once waved wobbly, iridescent globes into the air, each one carrying an invisible fairy off to a distant sea.

It's still hard for me to believe that all of this has vanished, that those times are truly gone for good. How fresh and green they are, still, in my memory – the intense, constant physical intimacy as well as the countless peanut-butter sandwiches, bedtime stories, earaches and scraped knees, baking soda volcanoes, snowball fights, trips to town for ice-cream cones. Yet I am grateful to have had all of those moments, for they are the ones that have turned out, in the end, to be the most precious recollections of all, though they went unrecorded, unwritten, unremarked on at the time.

Our photo albums from those days are full of pictures of birthday cakes and holiday celebrations, vacation trips and family adventures, piano recitals and baseball games. But the memories I find myself sifting through the past to find, the ones that I would now give anything to relive, are the ones that no one ever thought to photograph, the ones that came and went as softly as a breeze on a summer afternoon.

No picture, or home video, or diary entry can begin to capture the nubby texture, subtle tones, and secret shades of a family's life as it is from one hour, or day, or season, to the next. It has taken a while, but I know it now—the most wonderful gift we had, the gift I've finally learned to cherish above all else, was the gift of all those perfectly ordinary days.

Reading this book, I mostly thought of my two little ones, but in re-reading these passages, I also found myself nostalgic for my own childhood. For the easy camaraderie I had with my brothers and sister, the way that we were all so entwined in each others' lives.

I think my mom lived her life trying as hard as she could to cherish the gift of all those perfectly ordinary days. At her funeral, Terry read her favorite excerpt from her favorite play, *Old Town*. You can read it [here](#).

I don't think we can be reminded too many times how wonderful life is. I'm glad I had a mom who helped share that lesson with me every day.

### **Week of isolation (2010-02-05 10:21)**

Due to a run-in with the stomach flu, our household has had a week of semi-isolationism. When I was out of town last weekend, Bryan got to experience our very first child throwing up incident. Actually, it was the second. The first was on a trans-continental flight, and can be read about [here](#). But that was more of a gagging incident.

At 2:47am on Saturday, January, 31; Bryan posted the following to Facebook:

Sylvia and I are getting matching T-shirts made up: "I survived the crib-barfing of 01/30/10".

Unfortunately, the crib barfing incidents were followed by the dad's-bed barfing incident, followed by several sitting on dad's lap barfing into a bucket incidents. She fell asleep at 4:30am and has been barf-free since.

When I got back home on Monday, Sylvia told me in excitement, "I pehp! Pehp. Sylva bed. Pehp. Daddy bed. Phep. Daddy pillow!" She pulled me into my room, crawled up on the bed, pulled back the covers, and showed me where the "pehpping" took place. Understandably, it made quite an impression on her.

Bryan caught Sylvia's bug on Tuesday night and was totally out of commission for two days. He's better now and back at work today.

After Bryan got sick, I decided to attempt to sterilize the house. Jessica brought me some Lysol cleaner, I pulled my steam cleaner out of the basement, and I tackled each room in the house with a fierce cleaning energy. By the end of the day on Wednesday, my hands were red and dry from all the cleaning and hand washing I'd been doing. Andrew's were too. But my house was cleeeeeaaaaan.

Andrew held up all week, and was healthy for preschool, but this morning, he had a bit of an unfortunate experience in the bathroom. Looks like he's got a touch of the bug. Sylvia and I have canceled nearly all our out-of-the-house activities this week. Wednesday night, she was up eight times in the night howling with a painful tummy. And her diaper situation has gone from normal to very unfortunately not normal.

So it looks like we'll be canceling our weekend plans as well.

I'm just really, really hopeful that the germs will all have dissipated by Monday. Granny comes to town on Tuesday, and I want us to be germ-free by then. Oh, and that means that I also need to stay healthy. Please, please!!

Thinking back, the last time Bryan had the stomach flu was in 1999. And the last time I had a stomach bug was in Botswana in 1997. Oooo, that was a doozy. Liz and Janet, thank you for helping me through that one. Neither of my kids have ever thrown up before. So I'll just be thankful for the amazing run of luck we've had up to this point. And we'll keep drawing and reading books and watching videos until health is restored and we can rejoin society!

### **Only One for a few more days (2010-02-06 07:34)**

My baby turns two-years old on the 11th. Sweet baby Sylvia! I somehow can't believe it. While many of her friends are already two, I find myself saying on a daily basis, "She's just One!" When she's having problems, she's just one. When she is being heartbreakingly sweet to Andrew, she's just one. When she wakes up two or four or eight times in the night, she's just one. When she gets dressed all by herself and has well-formed ideas about her clothes, her food, her books, she's just one.



When Sylvia first turned one, she was just stepping (crawling) out of tiny babyhood. Now she's a full toddler and even setting her sights toward the world of preschoolers.



I went through all the clothes in her room yesterday, removing the last of the 12-month (too short in the arms and legs) items, and weeding out some of the 18-month clothes since many of them have become high-water pants and 3/4 length sleeves in the last couple months. I was thinking back on what life was like a year ago. When she was not-quite-one, she was pulling up and cruising on furniture. She was crawling after her brother.





A year ago, we had just recently improved her dreadful napping situation so she would nap for more than 20 minutes at a time. And she was still nursing. What times I spent nursing my sweet baby girl.



It was just about one year ago that Sylvia was still nursing every couple hours at night. In February 2009, I went to Texas with the kids to stay with Bryan's family, and I used the opportunity to wean her of some of her night feedings. She and I shared a room on the opposite side of the house from Bryan's parents and Andrew. When Sylvia woke to nurse, I would comfort her but not nurse her. And she wailed for 45 minutes. This happened three times, and each time, she wailed for 45 minutes. After the clock hit 4:30am, I nursed her. She was very unhappy for two other nights, but after that, she slept straight from bedtime until 4:30. What a wonderful relief that was! Continuous sleep is a wonderful thing. And these days, although she still tends to wake up 2-3 times, Bryan's usually the one who hears and re-settles her.



These days, Sylvia's favorite activities are dressing up in costume, or perhaps more often, running around in the buff with her big brother. She loves music...making music, dancing to music, listening to music. She loves dolls, and it's so sweet to watch her tend to them - feeding them, covering them with blankets, patting them. She loves to make me soup in her kitchen and warns me several times that it's hot and I must blow on it. She likes to color and play with play dough. And she spends hours at the sink or in the tub playing with running water. It seems to soothe her soul.



Sylvia is into high fashion. Or at least her version of high fashion. She picks outfits with lots of colors and dots and strips, she likes her hair done up in more than one barrette. She loves shoes, and since she was old enough to stand, I would come into her room in the morning, and instead of greeting me, she would gesture dramatically to her shoes...she wanted them on her feet!



Dear Sylvia, I am so honored and thankful that you came into my life. Thank you for bringing such vibrancy into our family. Thank you for being such a tender, fun person. Thank you for saying, "Daddy" when we go around the table at dinnertime to share a gratitude. Thank you for morning snuggles and bedtime stories, for jumping into new situations with such enthusiasm and vigor. For holding onto things and not letting go. For exclaiming each morning when we open the curtains, "Snow!" For becoming such an amazing playmate for Andrew. For being my little girl and for loving me.

I've loved being your mama these last two years, and I look forward with joy in my heart to seeing what comes next.

Love and hugs,

Mama

### **Bleak House (2010-02-08 11:06)**

Bryan and I really, really enjoyed the BBC mini-series Bleak House. I highly recommend it.

There's a scene that somehow seemed appropriate with our life this last week of stomach-flu-enforced isolation. Bryan quoted it the other night, and we both had a good laugh.

Sir Leicester Dedlock: Is it still raining my love?

Lady Dedlock: Yes my love. And I am bored to death with it. Bored to death with this place. Bored to death with my life. Bored to death with myself.

Sir Leicester Dedlock: What was that, my love?

Lady Dedlock: Nothing...of consequence.

[EMBED] Fortunately, this morning Bryan is healthy and at work, Andrew is healthy and at preschool and Sylvia is healthy and is at daycare at Donna's. And so far, I have escaped the bug. So we've all left our Bleak House, and the sun is shining! I'm grateful for our piles of books, for 101 Dalmations and The Fox and the Hound. For roasted turkey and tapioca pudding. For hours snuggling and blankets and days after days spent in pajamas. We've been "slugging it" here at the Dotzour house as everyone got well. I can't tell you, dear Internet, how happy I am to be rejoining the world!

### **Sylvia is two! (2010-02-15 16:27)**

My little sunshine girl is now a two-year-old! She and Andrew are currently racing around the house wearing only undies, and Sylvia's round little baby cheeks are peeking out under her pink horsie panties. The kids got temporary tattoos for Valentine's, and their arms and legs look spotted as they are both sporting around 15 pieces of body art on their arms and legs.

Sylvia's birthday on Thursday, February 11 was a lovely day. Bryan's mom had flown into town on Wednesday, and her being here helped it feel like a party.

To celebrate her birthday, we made pink cupcakes from The Pioneer Woman's new cookbook with an amazing cream cheese frosting. The recipe made almost two cups of extra frosting...and it may or may not have been almost entirely covertly eaten by me. We frosted the cupcakes in a variety of bright colors and put them on a blue-painted cake board with some pretty ribbon. Voila! Sylvia had a bunch of balloons for her birthday cake.



Here's Granny with her two happy grandkids.





Yay! Sylvia's two!



What follows are some pictures of a mid-afternoon cupcake party we had with Celia, Eli, and Jessica. Sylvia loved

having us sing happy birthday to her.



Clapping her hands in appreciation for our song.



Blowing out her candles.



Finally! It's time to eat!



Mmm. that frosting is sooo good!



That's my girl.





Mr. Eli enjoyed his cupcakes as well.



Bright-eyed Celia.



Guess what color cupcake she was eating...





Lovely Jessica seems to have avoided covering her face in frosting, unlike the smaller party attendees.



Check out the amazing placemat and napkin that Jessica applied for Sylvia. My girl loves it. "Two!" she says. "Cupcake. Two!"



Pretty pink tulips from Flagstads for my pretty two-year-old. Both of them are blooming happiness.



More photos of Sylvia's birthday evening are on their way! Looking back, it was a delightful day. Thanks LuAnn and Jessica, Eli, and Celia for helping us celebrate.

### **Sylvia's birthday evening (2010-02-16 12:34)**

Bryan came home from work on February 11 with a pretty balloon to the delight of his two-year-old. After supper, we put another set of cupcakes on our balloon tray and once again serenaded Sylvia with the birthday song.



She really understands the ceremony of singing and blowing out candles this year. And she's so excited that it is her turn!



After supper, we retired to the living room, where the kids ate their toes.



Bryan was disgusted.



Andrew did a super job of being a big brother to the birthday girl. It can be hard to have your sibling getting all the attention for the day, but he handled it quite well.





LuAnn got Sylvia this fantastic red corduroy cape. It's lined in a vibrant black and white flannel and has a great button at the neck. She's going to be so cute wearing it!



Then LuAnn really outdid herself and made Sylvia a beautiful dress. With a matching one for her dolly. And a matching purse. Sylvia immediately wanted to try them all on and checked out all the details.





Here's my favorite picture of my birthday girl.



Here, Sylvia is also sporting her new bath robe and her new red shoes!



My little water flower.



An outfit change...trying on jeans, a lamb shirt, and putting her shoes on herself.



She says, "Birthdays are great!"



Happy birthday, sweet Sylvia!



**Growing up...registering for kindergarten (2010-02-18 13:48)**

Can you believe that my little baby boy is going to be a kindergartner this fall?

It's true.





Four and a half years ago, he looked like this. He was a tiny newborn who didn't even know how to nurse. He was about to open his blue eyes to see the sunlight of a new day for the very first time. I slept with him curled right next to me because being apart from his little self made me feel like I was missing a limb or an organ.

He had grown in my womb, and through his birth, I became a mother and he became a child of the world.



Then he started growing up. Not being a newborn.





He started walking and running and then talking too.



As he's grown, Andrew has consistently shown his lovely self. He's solid. And smart. And imaginative. And determined. And reserved. And mellow. Except when he's crazy. He takes his time to warm up, and when he does, his smile shines like the sun.



He's made friends. Good friends. Who help him grow and adjust and delight in the world in new and wonderful ways.



He's gone from being a baby to becoming a big brother. And in that moment, he suddenly became so big, so grown up.



Andrew has loved going to preschool at Monona Grove Nursery School. I love the small size of his school, the wonderful teachers, the relaxed, play-based, non-academic atmosphere. It's such a gentle first school experience. Plus, the other children and their parents are so much fun.



Sending him to preschool two mornings a week last year and three mornings a week this year has been a wonderful addition to our days.

I recently learned that I need to register Andrew for kindergarten (I've also recently learned that I don't know  
1160

how to spell kindergarten). March 1. aaaaaak! Sorry, I'm better. I'm really excited about Andrew going to kindergarten. But. yeah. It feels like a big step. It feels like moving from the known and familiar to the unknown. He'll be away from me for seven hours a day, five days a week. He'll be going to school in a big building that has always looked to me more like a high school than an elementary school. And I think he'll be fine. I'll just need a little time to adjust. Here, in the comfort of the interwebs, I will adjust.



It's an odd thing, learning to let go. When our babes are tiny, it feels like we can control every aspect of their existence. We choose their toys and their clothes and the songs they listen to and the people they interact with. We can ensure that they only eat exactly the kinds of foods we want them to have in their precious little bodies. Then, slowly, that shifts. If we're smart, we let other people take care of them, give our children the opportunity to experience life solo with relatives and friends or babysitters. Then, suddenly, they have experiences that are apart from us. They know songs or books or games that we've never heard of. And it's wonderful, and it feels a little odd.

So this kindergarten thing is just a part of that whole letting go continuum. It's symbolic of starting in the long school process that will culminate in high school graduation. It's going to mean a big change in the way our days are structured and in the way we spend time together. And it's going to mean that most of Andrew's waking hours will be spent in the company of people I don't currently know anything about, but I'm sure they'll be lovely. Ahh, big changes.





By the time September rolls around, I think that my independent, brave little guy...who will then be five years old...will be all ready. Hopefully, I will be too!

#### **Kindergarten options (2010-02-19 10:32)**

This is the post I meant to write when I wrote about my little boy growing up. Now that I've had a moment to sigh and reflect and then to record all the dates for the 2010-11 school year in my calendar, I'm feeling a little more onboard with the whole "going to kindergarten" thing.

Our elementary school is just around the corner from our house. I love the idea of walking to school. I sure have loved walking (or biking or sledding) Andrew to Monona Grove Nursery School, which is just across the street from his elementary school. It feels so neighborly and sweet to be right close by.





The Frank Allis school houses (in apparently very crowded conditions) two separate schools. The first is the normal Allis Elementary School. There's a nice little write-up about that school on their website. Looks like it's been a school for 92 years! The second is a dual language charter school called Nuestro Mundo (click here for more info on their program).

On Monday night, I hurried through the falling light to attend an informational session on Nuestro Mundo. As I crossed the street toward the school, I stopped for a moment to snap the photo above on my phone. I've never been in this school before, and it struck me that after I walked through the doors, it would never be "new" again. At some point, it will probably be so homey and familiar that I won't even remember what it felt like when this building was new and foreign and a little bit scary.

The informational session was held in a third grade classroom, and the room was packed. It seemed to be about half English speakers and half Spanish speakers. The teacher who led the session addressed the room in Spanish and was then translated by another teacher. Questions were answered in both languages. Apparently, for future meetings (and PTO meetings and things like that) the presentations are done in Spanish, and English speakers wear a headset where they can hear simultaneous translations so the meetings go a little faster.

Nuestro Mundo is a charter school, and they enroll about 50 % Spanish speaking kids and 50 % English speaking kids. (See here for an article written about the school by my friend Samara.) In kindergarten, the instruction is 90 % in Spanish, and it shifts about 10 % a year until by third grade, instruction is half English, half Spanish. Children are taught literacy first in Spanish and then, after they are proficient readers, in English.

There is a lottery for enrollment in the school, and it sounds like about half of the students who want to get in actually make it. So in a way, I don't want to get too caught up in wanting this program, because who knows if we'll get in.

Here are some of my thoughts as I approach the idea of picking the right school for Andrew:

1. I want Andrew to love school. I'd like him to be happy at school, to connect to his teacher, to smile with his classmates, to feel comfortable and confident and secure. I'd like him to skip on his way to school. And even if he never will tell me one little bit about his day, I'd like to know in my heart that it was a good one, full of nice friends, compassionate teachers, and fun activities.
2. Wherever her goes, I wouldn't be surprised if it takes my young boy a little while to warm up. Andrew seems to be an observer by nature. I notice that in group settings, he often waits on the sidelines and checks things out until he feels comfortable enough to jump in. That said, he has a great time in his own little sidelines, and he's usually very content to play games or read or do art on his own until he's ready to engage with others. At least in preschool, Andrew seems to be a kid who plays well with everyone but who doesn't have a couple special friends. Whenever I ask him about his friends, he'll rattle off the names of several kids, and if I try to suss out who he most enjoys spending time with, he smiles and throws up his hands, "I like all my friends at school, Mom!"
3. Academically, I think that Andrew is pretty advanced right now. Due to his focused, cognitive nature, he's been fascinated with letters and reading for the last year. If he's in the mood, he can now read almost any picture book he picks up. I love it when he reads to Sylvia! His writing is somewhat legible, and he really enjoys writing "journals" and books. At the suggestion of his preschool teacher, I've made a little dictionary for him with all the words that he's asked me to spell for him. It's one of his favorite possessions. Andrew is also really interested in numbers and math, and he often asks me to quiz him with "a tricky one" about addition or subtraction. He loves telling the temperature, and we've been having fun this winter with negative numbers:) Because of all this, I think that the academic content of a traditional kindergarten will be much less important than the social and enrichment aspects of going to school. In the dual immersion language program, it looks like kids score lower on academic achievement testing for several years (actually until 6th grade at which point they score better than traditional classrooms). I'm guessing that this is because the kids are working on language skills in addition to everything else. If Andrew goes to the dual immersion language program, his early literacy and math skills might not lag as much as they do for kids since he's starting out with many early skills, and that makes me feel a little better, because to tell the truth, I have a bit of a hard time signing up for a program that could from some perspectives leave Andrew at an academic disadvantage.
4. The things that I love, love, love about Nuestro Mundo is that it could give Andrew something that Bryan and I can't give him...fluency in a second language. Even more than that, though, the school is designed to help students become global citizens. I love the idea of Andrew gaining a multicultural education (actually, this is true in either school). I love the idea of a school where he learns at such an early age about how to dive in and learn a new language, a new culture. Before I had kids, I remember thinking that I really wanted to expose them to a wide variety of people and cultures and situations. I had hoped to spend time in parts of town or in parts of the world that are very different from ours so that we could, together, build familiarity with that which initially feels foreign. We haven't really done this at all, and so maybe this is a great way to start!
5. A couple weeks ago, I read an article in my alumni magazine, The Carleton Voice about Carleton's growing international program. I thought the lesson applied strongly to our kindergarten choice:


About three years ago, stormy weather stranded Carleton President Robert Oden Jr. in the Detroit airport. Although his 37-hour delay was both regrettable and forgettable, he came across a magazine article that wasn't. On the subject of global leadership, the writer had interviewed more than 20 leaders in business, industry, the arts, and government from around the world.

"When they were asked how future leaders should be educated, their answers were remarkably similar," recalls President Oden. "Almost all of them said something like: 'Become fluent in at least two, preferably three languages—and spend as much time as you possibly can with people from other countries.' " A number of the leaders went on to describe the importance of developing the knowledge, understanding, and skills required to effectively communicate and negotiate with people from anywhere in the world."

Fine! I thought, I'll be brave! I'll sign Andrew up for a program in which he'll be jumping into 90 % Spanish. The teachers seem terrific, and they'll help him along. Andrew seems to talk in gibberish half the time, and he eats up the Spanish words that I share with him, so picking up a new language should come pretty easy to him. Ahh, I don't know. I find myself really leaning toward Nuestro Mundo, but I'm wondering...what are your thoughts?

FYI, here's the school data profile for the Frank Allis Elementary School and here's the school data profile on Nuestro Mundo.

**NUESTRO MUNDO ELEMENTARY - DATA PROFILE**  
2008-09



ADRIAN METROPOLITAN  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

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**STUDENT DATA (All data Sept 2008 unless otherwise specified)**

<b>Enrollment Total</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	213	<b>2007-08</b>	181	<b>2006-07</b>	147
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<p><b>Enrollment by grade</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">KG</td> <td style="width: 10%;">1</td> <td style="width: 10%;">2</td> <td style="width: 10%;">3</td> <td style="width: 10%;">4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>45</td> <td>41</td> <td>43</td> <td>43</td> <td>41</td> </tr> </table>	KG	1	2	3	4	45	41	43	43	41	<p><b>Enrollment by ethnicity</b></p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">African Amer:</td> <td style="width: 10%;">30</td> <td style="width: 10%;">14.1 %</td> <td style="width: 30%;">Asian:</td> <td style="width: 10%;">3</td> <td style="width: 10%;">1.4 %</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hispanic:</td> <td>113</td> <td>53.1 %</td> <td>Native Amer:</td> <td>1</td> <td>0.5 %</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total Minority:</b></td> <td><b>147</b></td> <td><b>69.0 %</b></td> <td><b>White:</b></td> <td><b>66</b></td> <td><b>31.0 %</b></td> </tr> </table>	African Amer:	30	14.1 %	Asian:	3	1.4 %	Hispanic:	113	53.1 %	Native Amer:	1	0.5 %	<b>Total Minority:</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>69.0 %</b>	<b>White:</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>31.0 %</b>
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<b>Free/Red. Lunch:</b>	122	57.3 %	<b>ESL:</b>	11	5.2 %	<b>Special Education:</b>	6	2.8 %
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**ALLIS ELEMENTARY - DATA PROFILE  
2008-09**



**STUDENT DATA (All data Sept 2008 unless otherwise specified)**

**Enrollment Total**    2008-09    385            2007-08    407            2006-07    426

**Enrollment by grade**

<KG	KG	1	2	3	4	5
1	65	56	64	60	68	71

**Enrollment by ethnicity**

African Amer:	120	31.2 %	Asian:	28	7.3 %
Hispanic:	113	29.4 %	Native Amer:	3	0.8 %
Total Minority:	264	68.6 %	White:	121	31.4 %

**Free/Red. Lunch:**        268        69.6 %    **ESL:**        122        31.7 %        **Special Education:**        46        11.9 %

**Dreaming of spring (2010-02-22 07:55)**

I'm happy to report that it is the last week in February, and I am still enjoying winter. True story! I'm having fun playing in the snow, going sledding, bundling the kids up for walks in the neighborhood. I have a sense that spring is the next season, but so far, I'm not too anxious for it to be here. My goal is to be a fan of winter until about March 10. Then, when I start going spring-crazy, it'll actually be coming in the next month or so.)

Yet, as I gazed out the window at my snow-covered yard, I found myself dreaming of green things growing. I imagined dirt and worms and grass and flowers. The Flower Factory just sent me their enormous catalog of plants, and in a fit of gardening inspiration, I decided to map out an ambitious garden for our backyard. Bryan and I have been envisioning this garden for four or five, or maybe six years now, but we've worked on other parts of the yard up to this point.



If you're interested in helping dig up some turf in April, let me know! I think we'll need help:) Also, I totaled up the cost of the plants that I think I'd like to fill in this new garden, and it totaled (sigh) \$400. So maybe we'll do this on a multi-year program.



It's fun to have a plan in hand and a plant list ready. When the ground thaws, I hope we're able to spend a weekend removing some turf and laying down landscaping fabric and putting in some edging. Then the fun part...new plants! It'll be a prairie garden, and I can't wait to have some of my favorite prairie plants growing in my own yard.



### **Admiration (2010-02-23 13:56)**

Andrew has a friend over to play this afternoon. From the moment she walked in the door, Sylvia has been mesmerized by Olivia. She stands still, hardly breathing, just watching this amazing four-year-old galavant around our house. Then my little Sylv ran into her bedroom and came back without her dress on. She was holding a purple shirt. A purple shirt just like Olivia.

Sylvia's jeans are in the wash, and she was beside herself, pointing wildly at Olivia's jeans and sobbing. I tried to talk her into dark purple or dark blue pants, but she couldn't stand the idea of not correctly modeling after her new idol. Fortunately, with a nudge from me, Olivia turned to Sylvia and told her (in her sweet lisp) that Sylvia looked great and that they both had on purple shirts, which was really cool. Sylvie didn't smile or acknowledge the comment, but I could just see her little posture change as she absorbed the world. Then my little girl turned and headed happily into her room...content with the rightness of the universe.

\*\*

Sylvia is now napping and Olivia and Andrew are playing in his bedroom. There's lots of laughter and some angry words and then more laughter. They're currently discussing where the babies are pooping (everywhere!). Earlier there was some raised voices and announcements that there would be no marriage until after they were grown up.

Cute kids:) Seeing Sylvia so aware of other kids makes me aware of some of the differences between my two  
1168




kids. Andrew just generally doesn't seem to model his clothing or behavior after other kids. Like as a general rule, Andrew's doing his own thing and so what others are doing is only interesting to him as it relates to his current activities. Sylvia absolutely loves to emulate other's behavior. She is currently really intense about noting/wanting other kid's clothes and shoes and toys. She loves to copy her brother. Or me. Or Bryan. And apparently, she also now likes to dress like super cool preschoolers. It's really interesting to see the stages that kids go through as they change and grow.

Love,

Althea

### **Olympics maddness (2010-02-24 07:45)**

I love the Olympics. Really, really love them.  In general, I'm pretty luke-warm about sports. Actually, usually I'm just plain uninterested in sports. But there's something about the Olympics that gets me so excited and hopeful and happy and obsessed.

Since the opening ceremony on February 12, we've been watching the evening broadcast each night. That first weekend, we watched it during the day too. Then on day four, Tuesday last week, I needed a break. So I wrote the Olympics a note:

Dear 2010 Winter Olympics,

These last four days have been great. Really, really great. I've laughed, I've yelled, I've even gotten misty-eyed. So thank you.

But, my dear Olympics, I think I need a break. Just a night...a little time off. It's me not you. Things have just been moving so fast...

So I'm making a choice to skip the men's figure skating short program and women's super G and some speed skating. I may regret it, but I think it's the best choice for me tonight.

See you again on Wednesday!

Love,

Althea

Since that one night away from Olympics, I've been back 100 %, and it's been great. I love the variety of events. The skiing is great. And short track speed skating really makes me excited. I love figure skating too, although I'm not nearly as devoted a fan as I was in the '90s.

I wish I had a photo to post of myself at the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. Terry and I went together just before little Joe was born; I was 10 years old. My favorite parts were collecting pins, walking around the Olympic village, meeting the mascots Hidy and Howdy, watching a lady use her fur coat as a sled to slide down a hill, and drinking hot chocolate at the cross-country event while listening to the Swiss folks ring their enormous cow bells. My least favorite parts were losing my hat on a bus on the way to a skiing event and then discovering that my pink moon boots

weren't waterproof and getting so wet and cold that I cried.

It's too bad that the 1016 summer Olympics won't be in Chicago...it would have been a lot of fun to take the kids! My brother Joe is an Olympics-lover as well, and he hopes to go to London in 1012. I hope he does so I can live vicariously!

What's your favorite part of the Olympics? Do you prefer summer or winter? How do you feel about Bob Costas? What are you going to do when they're over?

Love,

Althea

### **Photography preparedness (2010-02-25 07:27)**

January and February are gestating months for my photography business. I started Althea Dotzour Photography last summer, had a fabulous first six months. Really! Who knew that running a photography business could be so very, very much fun!

x

The months and weeks leading up to Christmas were super busy. I just loved helping my clients put together great gifts and cards for the holidays. Then throughout January, I've switched gears and have been doing a lot of behind-the-scenes work on my business. I've read lots of books on providing stellar customer service and on running a successful business. I've been meeting with another up-and-coming photographer, Mallory (Fitzgerald Photography), and it's been so energizing to have someone to talk with whose business is in a similar position.

My to-do list is long and growing as I try to get all the administrative pieces in place for the year. Yet, new photo sessions are on the way. I have a newborn session scheduled in a few weeks (yay baby!), a business session planned for April, and lots of people starting to talk to me about session when the weather warms and the earth greens up! If you're interested in scheduling something this spring, give me a call so I can get you on my calendar:)

I'm about to sign up for a two-day workshop with one of my photography role-models, Audrey Woulard. If I get into the workshop...wow. It's going to be so amazing!! Audrey does incredible work, and I have a feeling that spending a couple days with her (and my fellow workshop attendees) will provide a major boost to my photography work this year.

I feel so lucky to have the opportunity to pursue my creative passion, to help families capture fleeting moments, and to connect with so many wonderful clients. Looking forward to the future!!!

## 6.3 March

**Helllloooo March! (2010-03-01 15:06)**

Happy March 1 everyone! March...the month of St. Patrick's Day...the month that welcomes the official first day of spring...the month where we average eight inches of snow. March is, I must remember, certainly not spring. Yet it is the end of winter. I recall the phrase "In like a lion, out like a lamb." Well, this year March didn't come in like a lion. The sun is shining, the temperature has soared to the high-thirties, and it's in general a delightful winter day.

In fact, I went to the grocery store yesterday WITHOUT A WINTER COAT. I can't believe it either. The very idea of not needing to wear a coat seems ludicrous. I just wore my fleece jacket, and I was fine. Yeee haaawww.

Now with March upon us, I'm looking around my home and wondering how I should mix up my decorations for the month. Did you know, by the way, that I change my home decorations every month? Or at least every season. Who does that, really? Me, I guess:) September through April I change my home decor every month, and then spring and summer I keep things pretty constant. Except my American Girl, Kirsten, who I change each month. This seasonal decorating is something that I started doing around age 12, and I haven't been able to stop. I've toned it down a little from my teen years when I changed all my wall hangings as well. Now I only change some of my wall hangings. Something tells me that if Bryan lived alone, his home would not have seasonally changing decor...

My January decorations feature snowmen and polar bears and other wintery items. In February I add in some red items. And March I switch out the red with green. And I'm thinking that maybe the polar bears should depart. Maybe some rainbows should take their place.

I've been curious what my yard and the neighborhood will look like at the end of March, and thanks to my Flickr archives, I can easily see photos from the last five years. For instance, when I look at March 2007, I get see a calendar with a thumbnail from each day I took photos.

March 4 looks really snowy...like the world outside my window today.



Then on March 19, it looks like my siblings and I all took a walk to our neighborhood park in some balmy weather.



And look...on March 27, 2008, crocuses were popping from the earth in Jessica's yard:



Maybe I'll even be bringing home some pansies this month as I was on March 29, 2008!



What a cutie that little two-year-old Andrew was!

We have some fun plans this March. This weekend we're doing our semi-annual weekend at Jack's house. Maretta and Kyle are driving down from St. Paul, which should be so great. I haven't seen them since Michael and Lisa's wedding in October! Then on March 12, Joe comes home from college for spring break. He'll be in Madison for over two weeks, so I'm hoping to soak up some good Joe time. My little bro will be graduating in May, and I'm so excited to see what adventures come his way. Then there are the Oscars (March 8...always a good fashion time), Michael's 29th birthday on March 19, and Joe's 22nd birthday on March 25th.

Welcome to you, March! Hoping your month finds you healthy, active, and full of good cheer.

### **Got wool? (2010-03-02 12:19)**

Winter is a long season here in Wisconsin. A long, cold season. And if I'm in the right frame of mind, I love it. I love snuggling with cats and drinking warm beverages. I love playing in the snow and seeing the crispness of a starry winter sky. I love watching the pure white snow sparkle under a bright winter sun with the sky blue as blue can be. I like crawling into my warm bed (we got a heated mattress pad a couple years ago...such a good purchase!) and my soft flannel sheets. I like how life slows down a bit in winter. There are no gardens to tend, no late night walks to take. Sitting and drinking hot chocolate and reading is just perfect.



One thing that I don't like so much about winter is that I often am cold. We keep our thermostat kind of low, and I sometimes have found that I don't feel really warm from October to May. I was mentioning this to my friend Janelle last winter, and she asked if I wore long underwear and knee-high wool socks. I told her I didn't, and she suggested that I adopt those behaviors as soon as possible.

Do you know about Smart Wool? When I was in graduate school, my friend Jennifer introduced me to Smart Wool socks. They're wool, and, she informed me, they keep her cold feet warm all winter and they keep her feet cool in the summer. Plus (and this is a big plus for clammy-footed me), the wool has magic powers that keep her feet dry and odor-free.

Since then, I've acquired several pairs of Smart Wool socks. In the past, I've mostly used them as hiking socks or wear-around-the-house socks. But after talking to Janelle, I decided to add some knee-high Smart Wool into my wardrobe. And over the last couple years, I also acquired two Smart Wool long-sleeved shirts. They're expensive, but I can personally attest that the cost is worth it. Since I've been wearing my knee-high wool socks and my wool shirts, I've been warm! On the rare day that I'm not wearing wool, I usually find myself wondering why I'm so darn cold. Oh, and a scarf around my neck helps too!

So this is my winter tip to you. Get thyself some wool. If you're at all wool sensitive (I am!) I recommend Smart Wool. Oh, and getting an electric mattress pad to heat up your bed before you climb in is such a luxury. You'll be glad you did.

#### **Registered for kindergarten (2010-03-03 08:00)**



On Monday afternoon, I registered my big little boy for kindergarten. My plan was to take him with me so we

could register together, but as we started walking across the street from his preschool to the Frank Allis elementary, I turned around and saw that his face had crumpled and he was teary. "I don't want to go to kindergarten," he implored. "I just want to stay at preschool." Well, my boy, I couldn't agree with you more.

We talked a little about how sometimes new things can make a person feel nervous. And then we decided that I would just go register him by myself later in the afternoon.

Jessica came over to watch my kiddos, and I walked, for the second time, through the doors of the Frank Allis elementary school. I'll admit that I felt nauseated. And I'm excited about kindergarten. There's just something about this whole registration thing that is getting me in my gut. I feel happy, excited, and ready to run for the bathroom. Seems like many moms of soon-to-be-kindergartners are in the same boat:)

I filled out 8,269 forms, set up a screening appointment for Andrew, and learned out about two open houses in May and August. Then I stepped into a separate room and met with the principal of Nuestro Mundo. A couple weeks back, I wrote about how we were trying to decide if Nuestro Mundo would be a good fit for our guy. As I've thought and read about it more, I got really excited about the dual language opportunity, and so I filled out the paperwork and signed our boy up. There will be a lottery next month to determine who gets into the program. They are accepting 45 students. And so, in addition to my nervous tummy, I'm also going to be trying hard not to think or worry too much about the outcome of the lottery. We are supposed to find out in late April. And I'll let you know!

I'm hoping that Andrew feels some excitement or at least not trepidation as we plan to attend the "play with a cool teacher for a while" (aka kindergarten screening) next Tuesday:) Maybe he and I should get some ice cream afterward to sweeten the deal!

And, as I reminded Andrew yesterday while I knelt next to him in an earnest conversation on the snowy sidewalk between his preschool and elementary school, we still have one, two, three more months of preschool and then one, two, three whole months of summer until school starts in the fall. And by that time, I imagine that both he and I will be much more ready:)

### **Winter weekend at Jack's (2010-03-08 10:54)**

We're all back home after a lovely weekend at Jack's house. Jack is a family friend-like-family who has a house on the Wisconsin River in southwestern Wisconsin, quite near Prairie du Chien. My family has been enjoying trips out to Jack's house since before I was born, each time we're there, I feel my soul fill up.

Attendees this trip included Jack, Terry, Tom, me, Bryan, the kids, Michael, Lisa, Maretta, Kyle, and my dad for a visit on Saturday afternoon. During our summer weekend, we put on life preservers and float down the Wisconsin River, eat waaay too much, play Trivia Pursuit and other games, look at the stars, hike on Jack's prairie, eat too much, and generally enjoy being snug together in a place we all love.

Our winter trip is similar...minus the float down the Wisconsin River, which would kill us all in March. We supplement our Saturday with a bonfire...burning piles of brush from Jack's on-going prairie restoration efforts. The stars were so crisp and clear our first night, and Kyle gave us a sky-tour of all the major stars and planets and constellations. He set up Jack's telescope, where he was able to see Saturn's rings. Just so you know, a weak telescope does not show Saturn to look like this. It might look more like this.

It was great to see Maretta and Kyle again since I've missed seeing them since Michael & Lisa's wedding in October. I do so love my sister:) Joe wasn't able to join us this year, but he comes home in a few days for spring break, so we're happily anticipating that time!

I didn't take many photos of our trip this year. I'll put some up when I download them. In the meantime, I'm having some minor/major laptop problems that has made me decide to format and reinstall everything, so that should be pretty crazy!

Sylvia was driving me nuts this morning with continuous whining and complaining. After getting into my makeup and giving herself a lipstick makeover, her mood seems to have improved dramatically. Remarkably, mine took a turn for the worse:)

Back home amidst the melting snow and foggy air!

### **Beans 'n Rice (2010-03-08 16:04)**

\*\*Written Feb. 25, but something funny happened\*\*\*

I try to do weekly meal planning. Over the last year, I've sat down over the weekend and written up a meal plan for the week. This February, however, I've fallen off the meal-planning band wagon. We've been eating scraps. Cereal. Odds and ends. And beans and rice.

I recently added the ingredients of this dish into our pantry staples, so I've pulled it out a few times in the last several weeks. Sometimes we have some chicken sausage on the side. It's been a good meal for us. Sylvia loves it. I love it. The boys think it's alright.

So without further ado, here's how you make it:

two cans (three cups) red kidney beans

one can coconut milk

one can water

one and a half cups of rice

Drain the beans and put them in a pot that will hold twice the bulk of the beans. Warm them gently over medium low heat. Meanwhile, warm the water and coconut milk in the microwave. Add the coconut milk, water, and rice to the beans. Cover and cook over low heat for 20 minutes (actually on my stove, I cook it on low-med). If there's too much liquid left after 20 minutes, uncover and raise the heat slightly.

Easy cheesy! Plus as I tell my kids, think of all the amino acid combinations they are getting:)

\*\*

As a note, while we were eating this meal tonight, Sylvia somehow fell off her chair. First she smashed her face into the table and then she plummeted to the ground, again, hitting her head or her face on the floor. It was a terrible looking fall. And she was so very sad. So we aborted supper. Then I held her until she stopped crying and through her hiccups asked to watch "whales show" from Fantasia 2000.

## **Writing and listening (2010-03-09 07:43)**

Greetings! I have a few moments here while Sylvia is napping, and I should really be washing my windows. Or cleaning the bathroom. Or the litter boxes. Or the kitchen. And I definitely should be sweeping and mopping. But you know, I just don't feel like it. I'm recently back from our weekend at Jack's, and I now find myself in a bit of a funk. My children are being decidedly disobedient and often rather unpleasant (who taught them how to whine, anyway?). So after scanning job listings for a bit (adult co-workers don't hit or throw things, do they?), I decided to just do a little writing.

Writing is cathartic for me, and I think that's one of the main reasons that I've been as faithful to this little blog as I have. I write to help clear my mind. Sometimes, I write so I will remember what my babies were like. Sometimes I write to help myself unwind a knotty thought or state of mind. Sometimes I write because it makes me feel like an individual, a person (an adult!) all my own.

One of my new favorite blogs is by one of my favorite writers, Katrina Kenison. She wrote a post last month that I've been wanting to share. In her post, she starts out by talking about how she has been pretty skeptical about computers and the internet. She just recently, and a bit reluctantly, started her blog. She goes on...

...I found that the discipline of writing a blog, even one or two short pieces a week, has kept me in closer touch not just with my readers, but with myself. Like prayer, or yoga, or meditation, writing, too, is a practice. I sit down, turn on the computer, and say hello to the watching, reflecting part of me. And then I listen, and write down what that quiet inner voice has to say.

...

I think that, when it comes right down to it, most of us do write for ourselves, not for an audience. We write to remind ourselves of what's important in our lives, to move beyond our petty cares and concerns and to get in touch with our true essence, our souls, the people we are in the process of becoming. And then, in gestures of faith and solidarity, we offer our gift, the gift of ourselves, to the world.

What a lovely way to think about writing. For those of my friends who don't blog regularly, when I do see a post, I feel like it's a gift. And I so enjoy having a few moments to listen to myself and to pour that out (in fits and starts!) to share with friends and family near and far. Thanks for reading!

## **March menu planning (2010-03-10 07:45)**

I find that my life functions much more smoothly and happily when I do weekly menu planning. Yet, because it takes a couple hours to plan and shop, sometimes I find myself in a non-planning rut. Like February. RUT.

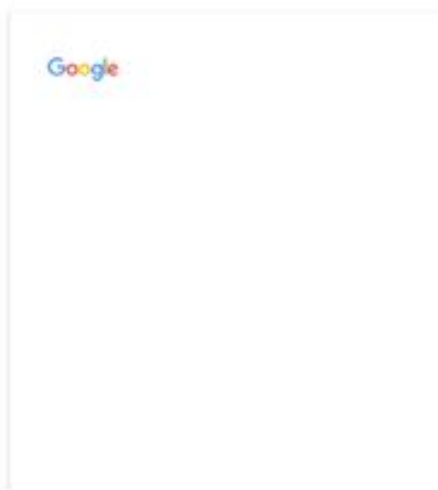
I tend to be a person who requires a recipe in order to create a meal. In the past, when I didn't have a plan

and was therefore required to \*poof\* create a dinner out of whatever we happened to have on hand, I would get really stressed out and more often than not we'd end up eating cereal. These days, I don't tend to experience that same stress. Perhaps its experience and wisdom setting in:)

Another funny thing about my meal planning is that I have a weird thing about not liking to repeat meals. I spent about a year making a different meal every night. Well, almost. We have spaghetti with tofu a lot. And a few yummy family casseroles make regular appearances.

Thanks to my dear Jessica, I've been getting the Everyday Foods magazine every month for a couple years, and I love it. I just went through all my past issues and pulled my favorite 50-80 recipes. They're so good and generally zippy fast. I've made so many recipes from this magazine, and I've found that if I like the ingredients (not for example, capers or fennel), it'll be a yummy dish.

In 2008, in an effort to take charge of my meal planning, I purchased a Plan-It Organizer, which is pretty much a souped-up notebook for organizing weekly meal ideas. Like a gym membership, paying money motivates me to take action. If I paid \$18 for a notebook, I better get some use out of it! So I used it faithfully until last fall. At that point...the same point that I got my iPhone...I decided to try electronic menu planning. I use Google Calendar for tracking all our activities, so I made a new calendar for our meal plans. It's nice because you can easily move around dishes to different days as schedules change. And now I can check it when I'm away from home.



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Since most of my recipes are from Everyday Foods or from cooking blogs, I can link from my calendar to the appropriate recipe...and I often use my iPhone or laptop as a cookbook on the counter while I cook.

I got off the meal-planning band wagon in January and February, but I'm back on now. Here's my normal (ideal) procedure:

- Saturday: (this takes 30-40 minutes)
  - consult my calendar to see what activities we have going on the next week so I know how many meals we'll need
  - flip through magazines or blogs to find recipes and make a list of the recipes I want to eat in the next week
  - make a list of the recipes we want. Even on weeks we have no evening plans, I usually assign 5-6 meals because one night we have left overs and another night we often end up making other arrangements or life gets crazy and I just boil a package of fresh ravioli with Parmesan for our meal.
  - make a shopping list of the ingredients needed for the meals (this is my least favorite part!)
- Sunday:
  - add to my list all the pantry staples and non-meal-specific items that we need
  - go grocery shopping at Woodman's

Often I wait to do meal planning until just before I'm going to leave for the grocery store. I really prefer to do it as a separate activity, though.

In the past, I used a Word document that I had laid out to match Woodman's as my shopping list. However, since December, I've been using an application on my iPhone for grocery shopping. I've got to say that I feel like a complete dork walking around the grocery store, consulting my iPhone instead of a piece of paper like a normal person. It feels like I'm bragging or being very high-falutin about my technology. But I do it because I'm avoiding using paper and because it remembers my list from week to week and because I can (and do) add to my grocery list whenever/wherever I happen to remember that I need an item. I've been using the Shopper application, and I like how it allows me to organize the list according to the layout of the store.

Last week, I just found out about a new new service that is going to really streamline my grocery shopping. Everyday Foods has a new app where you can pick your recipes and it adds all the ingredients to a shopping list. The shopping list is handled by a website called ZipList, and it's soooo cool (to me!). It's set up to pull recipes from blogs. So if you're reading a blog and like the recipe, you click on your little ZipList button in the toolbar, and it copies the recipe to ZipList. Click another button, and it adds the ingredients to my shopping list. Ahh, it's a geek's life.

The next couple months, I'm looking forward to going against my normal grain and repeating tried and true favorite recipes. I'll be posting them on my Google Calendar, so if you'd like any menu inspiration, please take a peek!

Also, if you have favorite dishes or food blogs/sources, let me know! I always like to try something new:)

PS. March must be a time I re-commit to meal planning. Check out this post I did in 2009!



### **Fresh, clean computer (2010-03-12 07:45)**

It rained much of today here in Wisconsin. The air has been thick with fog for the last several days because the snow is melting and the moisture is hovering close to the ground. Our street would have been a great setting for a werewolf film the other night... We even have owls for local ambiance.

The rain is cleaning all the salt and wintry muck off our cars, and suddenly, vehicles are pretty again. The automobiles are pretty, but I've got to say that the sodden, ground isn't that pretty. Except that, as Andrew keeps reminding me, "there are signs of spring!" Each new patch in the snow pack is a sign for my little boy. A delightful sign of spring.

As the clouds are washing the cars clean and removing the snow, I have decided to wash my computer clean. I heard that Ivory wasn't good for motherboards, so I did a format of the hard drive instead. My computer (which has served me well for four years) has recently taken to shutting down several times a day with a "blue screen of death." It was also running slow enough to kinda kill me.

So on Monday I did back-ups. And Tuesday I gathered my courage and did the reformat. And Wednesday and today, I've been re-installing programs. And learning that I didn't actually save my Firefox bookmarks (sniff) or my Firefox passwords file (oh dear).

But all in all (so far...knock on wood, toss salt over shoulder, cross eyes and chant) it looks like this reformatting endeavor was successful. I've got almost everything back up and running, and so far I have yet to see a blue screen.

Fresh start for spring...and for the upcoming photo season!

### **Playing house (2010-03-13 10:41)**

Alivia and Rayna just came over, and amidst the squeals of excitement and announcements...

Sylvia: (pointing outdoors at her swing that we hung out on the tree yesterday) "My swing! Rayna, my swing!"

Rayna: (pointing at her dad who was walking past the swing) "My daddy, Sylvia. Dat's my daddy."

Coats and backpacks were removed. The big kids turned to the little ones and said, "Let's play house!"

"House!! House!!!" shouted the little girls.

"You can be the babies," announced the big kids.

"Babies, BABIES!" delighted the little girls.

Four kids traipsed in a line out of the living room and back into the sun room where I imagine they'll amuse themselves (with only minor problems) at playing house.

This has become a somewhat ritualized game here at our house this month. As you might expect, Alivia is the mom (the little girls are often heard calling out, "Mama! Mama!!" ...but not for me!). Andrew's the dad. And Sylvia and Rayna are the babies.

They remove all the cushions from the love seat and sofa and build a fort in the sun room. Alivia just said,

"Andrew, can you please keep the babies occupied while I make the house?"

Despite the fact that the "parents" give a lot of directions (orders), the "babies" seem to enjoy the game immensely. My rules are: 1) Safety first and 2) Everyone needs to stay happy. Other than that, this "house play" has given me some fabulous time to, say write a blog post while the kids are happy and engaged and active.

Plus, I get to marvel at the fact that Sylvia is able to happily play without my intervention for long stretches of time. Thank you, Alivia!

### **Photos are back! (2010-03-14 10:00)**

Since my computer wasn't working too well the last few weeks, I haven't downloaded any images from my computer. So it was fun yesterday when I downloaded seven hundred images from snowy late February until rainy, mild last week. Our landscape sure has changed! So for the next few days, I'll regale you with photos. But if you want a sneak peak, you can find them in the photo gallery!

First, I'll share the best: my favorite new photo of each of my kids:





Have a great day!

### **Doll play (2010-03-15 08:00)**

My little girl loves playing with dolls. She nearly always has either a doll or a purse, and in the last couple months, she's spent vast amounts of time tending to the needs of her little charges. She puts them to sleep, gives them bottles, changes their dirty diapers, and hauls them around under her arm. When I come upon her talking quietly to her dolls, she looks up at me shyly and it's clear that I was interrupting some personal time!

Here's Sylvia putting a dolly (Tiny Dolly) to bed in the wooden cradle that used to be mine.



Checking to make sure her little one is comfy.



"Oh, there's Mom with her camera again."



Cheesy grin.



I like this out-of-focus look at my little girl as she's feeling tender and quiet.



Another morning, and another room for the crib (it gets pulled all over the house these days). I love this photo of Sylv.



Reading to her dolly.





Picking up Tiny Dolly for some snuggle time.



Giving Tiny Dolly some nutritious juice.



Oops. How did this one get in there? Sylvia likes to dress up just like Mommy.



'Tis the season to care for dollies. If you like playing dolls and having had the opportunity for quite some time, have I  
1188

got the girl for you!



Sibling love (2010-03-16 08:00)



Andrew and Sylvia are so cute together these days! They are playing well for increasing periods of time...maybe 20 minutes before needing intervention:)

Here's some happy kids and their toes.



Now what's going on here? Sylvia, do you think that's a good idea?



Fortunately, you've got a sweetie sweet brother:)



She loves him...up to the moon.



And he loves her right back.





Sylvia is highly influenced by the fashion sense of those around her. If, for example, her dolly is naked, she might decide that she must be naked as well. If a friend has taken off their socks, if Andrew's shirt got wet and he took it off...you got it...she's going to follow suit. Many a day, she has been digging through her brother's dresser to find her clothes for the day. Seems that she fits 4T clothes alright!



And Andrew is more than happy to have a devotee! Especially when they both are wearing big boy jammies, they're so cute!



I sure do love my kids. And little compares to the happiness I feel in my heart when they are interacting sweetly together.

**Wishin' you rainbows today (2010-03-17 07:17)**

Do you know that St. Patrick's Day is my favorite (after Christmas) holiday? It is! I love the burst of green in a somewhat dreary-looking month of March. I love the stories of leprechauns and the silliness and the rainbows. I love the folklore and getting to read fairy tales from Ireland.



I like that it's a minor holiday so I can feel a little like it's all mine.

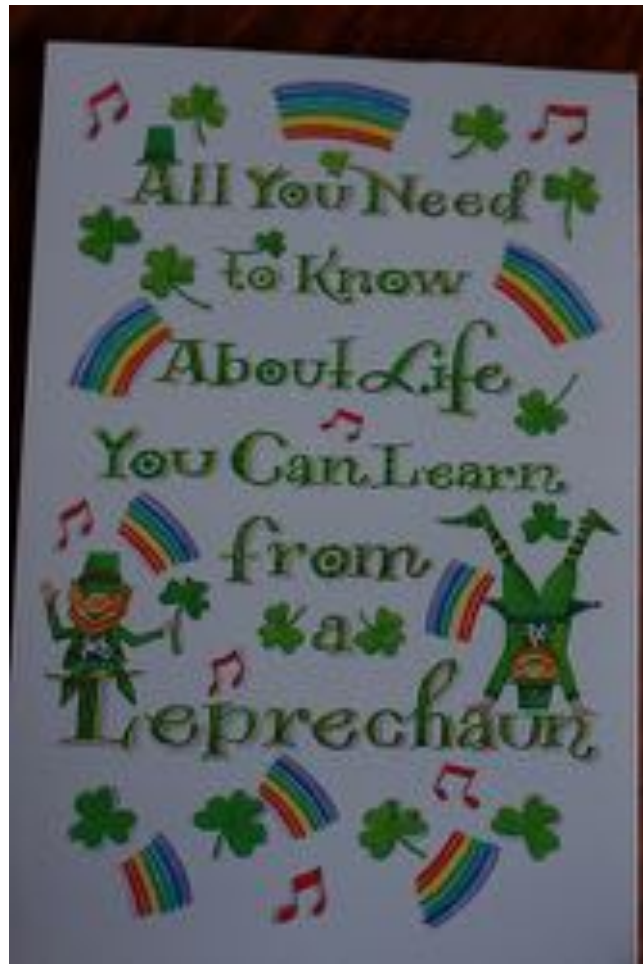
And I'm loving getting to share my joy about St. Patrick's Day with my kids. Andrew and I have spent the last couple weeks spying for leprechauns while we go for walks. How tall are they, we wonder...Sylvia's size, a foot high, or maybe only as tall as your thumb! We peek under bushes, and creep around trees. Who knows what we'll do if we see one!

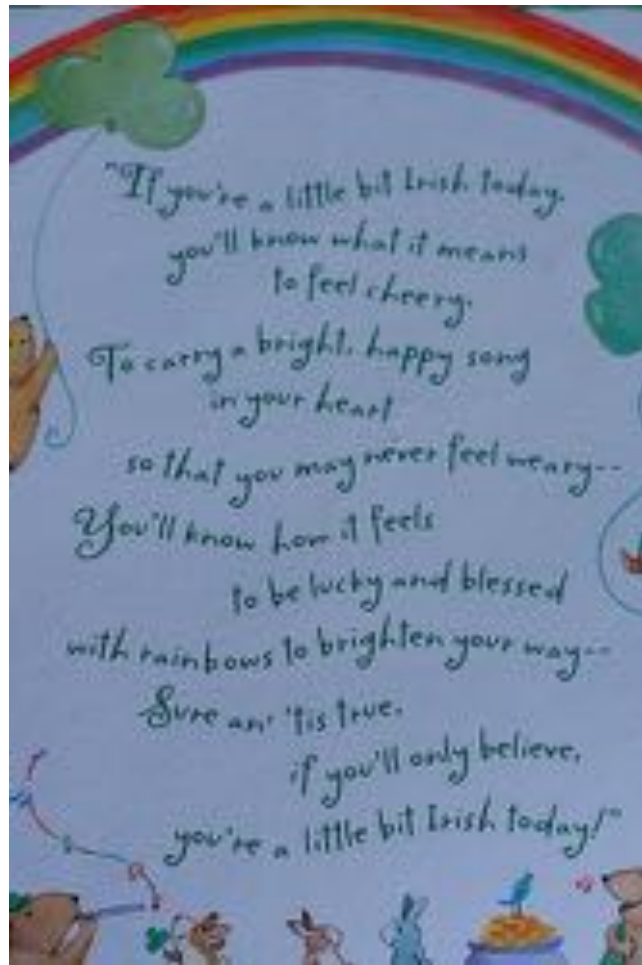
Andrew's also been having fun wearing green most days this month. He smiles his big, wonderful smile, does a little boy leap in the air and spreads his arms as he announces, "I've got on green for St. Patrick's Day, Mom!"

As part of my crazy seasonal decor, I sometimes decorate the house for St. Patrick's Day. This year, I put up St. Patrick's Day cards I've received over the years as well as some little pins and gifts from years past.



I've been receiving Cricket magazine since 1986, and they've often had good leprechaun tales, so I pulled several March issues to read to Andrew.





Even Kirsten wears green in March here in the Dotzour home.



I doubt you can see it much at all, but here's a photo of a rainbow we saw last week. It had been raining off and on all day, and as we walked inside, Bryan pointed out a colorful rainbow stretching across the gray sky.





I hope you're able to bring some cheer to someone's life today, and I hope there's some twinkling magic for you as well! Happy St. Patrick's Day!

### **Back in February...snow play with Eli and Celia (2010-03-18 07:27)**

On March 1, I went to Andrew's new elementary school to register him for Kindergarten (see the post I wrote about that right here). While I was at the school, Jessica, Eli, and Celia came over to hang out with my kids. Here are some lovely photos that Jessica took while I was away. It was one of our last really wintry afternoons.











Thanks for taking such lovely photos of your kids and mine, my friend!

### **Winter...into spring (2010-03-19 08:03)**

In late February, we lived in a snowy winter wonderland. We were sledding at Olbrich park, pulling the kids down the street in their sleds, and generally working hard to relish snow and winter for as long as possible so we didn't go stir crazy for spring too early!

Here's a little demonstration of the transition over the last several weeks.

Here we have a sparkling, snowy morning. The tree is a maple that Bryan transplanted from a seedling a few years ago. Those silver maples grow fast!!





So the chain link fence isn't particularly picturesque, but the glittering snow is lovely!



Here's my new sunflower sun catcher from Heather. A beautiful bit of summer hanging in my snowy window.



In Sylvia's room, I have a wintry (white) fairy display. I just switched it to a brightly colored spring display. Bye bye  
1206

winter!



Then, the first weekend in March, the snow started melting. Mellinging!



And within a few days...



The snow was gone!



Bye bye snow, hello spring...

More snow may be on the way, but this week, I took pictures (with my phone) of crocuses and snowdrops at Olbrich!





Spring...in the form of flowers and soaring turkey vultures and migrating sandhill cranes has made a stand! Our neighborhood owls (who've been hooting every night for months) have hatched at least one chick. A neighbor found the shell on the ground beneath their tree.

Hip hip hooray for spring!

## Looking into new web hosts (2010-03-20 11:24)

Hello friendly readers,

How do you feel about the speed of my blog? I, for one, am feeling like it's waaaay to slow. Especially on my photography website. Ugh. It hurts to watch it load.

So with my free moments this morning, I started looking at hosting alternatives. And being myself, I started by looking for an environmentally conscientious/green hosting provider.

SuperGreen hosting is looking good to me. They're supposedly fast with Wordpress sites, which is the platform I use for my blogs, and they use renewable energy, plant trees, and don't run horrible ads like GoDaddy. yeah, I've got to switch.

Of course, it's more than likely that I'll run into problems that will shut down one or both of my sites for a couple days or will keep me up until 2am staring at my computer in confusion and sadness, but in the end, hopefully this little website will run much faster for you and I'll sleep better knowing that I'm supporting a better hosting company!

Thoughts? Suggestions? Warnings? Offers of chocolate?

## Enough time (2010-03-21 09:08)

"Everything changed the day she figured out there was exactly enough time for the important things in her life".

✕ I ran across this quote from The Story People while I was browsing the web today, and it made me happy. Being a stay at home mom, I sometimes find myself with excessive time. Sometimes these last few months, when the day starts and we have no plans, I feel like I can see time stretching out toward dinner and bedtime as a loooong road that me and the kids would need to travel together. Or perhaps like it was an obstacle course, and my goal was to make it to the finish in one piece.

If I was working outside the home, I think I'd be scrambling to find time to do the basics: grocery shopping, laundry, meals... Being home full time, I sometimes think that all I have is time, but I've also got some individuals I live with who can make productive work, uh, challenging. In fact, even with all the time I do have, I often find myself scrambling to do the basics. Kids don't cooperate, snuggling time occurs, life gets complicated, tantrums happen, playtime stretches out...

I find that I tend to be compulsively honest about not making excuses. If I'm late or didn't get something done, I find that I feel much better about fessing up with the honest truth rather than a light excuse. "I'm not on time because I stayed in my pajamas too long." "I didn't finish that project because I wanted to snuggle with my husband and watch The Office rather than work last night." Those feel better to me than, "Traffic was bad." or "We got really busy." Along those lines, I don't really like the "I didn't have time" excuse. It's often true, and in some cases, there is just too much that absolutely needs to get done. But when I hear "I didn't have time" (or when I hear myself say it!),



I also hear "It just wasn't important enough."

There's time for the important things. There's always time for the important things, but it means I have to prioritize. One of my goals is to keep a sharp eye out for the important things so I'm sure to make time for them in my life!



### **Successful Chicago visit (2010-03-22 07:34)**

I feel like our little family of four has achieved a new level on this video game we call life. As we were driving home from Chicago today with two content children in the back seat, I felt like there could be a sign flashing on our windshield saying,

Congratulations! At least for today, you have entered phase B15. Vacations for fun are an option.

We took a day trip to Chicago to celebrate my brothers' birthdays. As Bryan and I discussed the trip, I was pretty sure we'd be in a mode where we would be attempting to have fun amidst two kids who were not doing well. I didn't figure Sylvia would handle the car trip well (two hours each way). I didn't figure she'd do that well at brunch at the Four Seasons. And then I wasn't sure how she'd handle the Field Museum when it was nap time.

In fact, because she's been less than a stellar traveler in the past, we haven't done many driving trips with her. Two and a half hours of screaming on a couple trips early on kinda did me in. The girl doesn't stop when she's made up her mind. And she doesn't sleep in the car!

But...I was wrong. Happily, delightedly wrong.

Both kids did a splendid job on the drive down to Chicago. They both did really well (especially thanks to the help of Tom, Terry, and Uncle Bubba) at brunch. Then they both loved the visit to the Field Museum. Sylvia almost fell asleep on Bryan part way through, but she was bound and determined to keep those eyes open.

And on our drive home, Bryan and I looked at each other with wonderment, contemplating a future that might involve more day trips to Chicago (Brookfield Zoo, the Aquarium, Navy Pier, walking on the waterfront) or Door County or just farther than across town. Maybe driving farther than across town is a prerequisite, because last week, she threw fits as we drove across town on three separate occasions. I think she liked the adventure of Chicago.

Now that my girl is well into being Two, I'm starting to get more glimpses of what like with two kids (as opposed to one kids and one baby) might be like. Amazing!

### **Goose Egg (2010-03-23 07:09)**

I was reading stories to Eli, Andrew, and Celia on Friday, when a crash from Sylvia's room sent me flying out of my chair. [She's fine.] While quietly browsing books in her crib, my young girl decided to attempt to climb out.

It didn't go well.

Since I didn't see her plummet to the (hardwood) floor, I wasn't sure where she was hurt. And it wasn't until several hours later, when Bryan was home, that we noticed that she had a huge purple goose egg on her forehead.

So that means she fell out of her crib onto her head.

It also means that I didn't notice a golf ball sized goose egg for several hours. My girl's bangs are getting thick.

Ahh, parenting. It's going to give me gray hairs.

Now, do I hope that this fall taught her not to attempt another climb and therefore keep her in her crib, or do I assume that by falling and not getting seriously hurt that she has used up her chance and I should pull out a big girl bed? I am NOT looking forward to the second option by the way as I assume that it is going to make naps and bedtime much more difficult to enforce because she'll be able to get out of bed.

Any insights will be appreciated.

## Chasing UFOs (2010-03-23 07:21)

A few weeks ago, we spent a Saturday morning at Terry's place while Bryan was participating in a chess tournament. Terry was recently home from a long vacation, and one of the toys he brought home was a flying UFO. He flew it around his condo, and the kids loved it!

Here's some pics of my kids being goofs and having fun.







I just love these next two!!







My new favorite picture of my girl.



This soft bunny is a puppet that Terry got at a store in St. Paul a couple years ago. It's such a cute toy, and Sylvia carried it around under her arm. Such sweetness:)





**Playtime with friends (2010-03-24 15:10)**

We've been seeing a lot more of our neighbors Alivia and Rayna these days (I wrote about some of their cute games in a recent post). The little girls had a rough patch where they weren't tolerating each other very well, but then, suddenly, all the concerns about what was, "MINE!" seemed to evaporate, and they're fast friends. In fact, the other day, when Sylvia saw Rayna walking down her driveway (three houses down), she leapt off her trike, raised her arms above her head in an elaborately excited gesture, and raced down the street toward her...shrieking in glee. It's been so lovely having all four kids playing happily and easily together!

Here's a few photos of them several weeks ago when we needed coats and hats:



Girls running!



Alivia thoughtfully working.



It's so fun to watch how they play together:)



One of our last snowy pictures from early March. The kids were digging a hole. In their minds, it was a really big hole.



Seeing more of our neighbors again has been one of the really nice parts about the coming of spring!



**Farm day (2010-03-25 08:15)**

I spent the morning yesterday playing at the A-Z Farm in Oregon, WI with Andrew's preschool class. It was so fun to see all the adorable baby animals and to see the adorable four and five year olds petting them. Such cute overload. Also, why is it that I have a strong urge to squeeze baby chicks? They're so cute, I just wanna squeeze them. I should stay away from chicks. Definitely.

I took pics of the animals to share with you. Here are some of my favorites:











And then for comic relief:



**Quote for the day (2010-03-26 10:43)**

If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile and blossom like a flower, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh



**Zombies, Easter eggs, and Sylvia cuteness (2010-03-27 23:09)**

Today, Bryan had a chess tournament in Pewaukee. Uncle Bubba and Aunt Lisa came over to watch the kids while I went to a meeting, and then we all hung out together for a few hours.



We don't often just spent most of the day with Michael and Lisa, and it was a lot of fun.



Andrew's favorite part of the day may have been helping Michael play Plants vs. Zombies on the computer. Or maybe his favorite part was probably dying Easter eggs. We had a dance party in the living room while we waited for the eggs to be ready to take out of the cups.



I love the pretty, rich colors of Easter eggs!



Sylvia has had a really good couple of days. She's still in her crib as we contemplate whether/when to move her to a bed. She's been doing really well at potty training. She's been using the toilet off an on since last fall, but in the last few weeks, she's been doing a great job of telling me when she needs to go. That's a big step!

This week, she's been wearing pull-ups all day, and for the most part, she's stayed dry. Yay for Sylvia!

Oh, and today, she also started saying some really heart breakingly sweet things. Like as I cough, "Bess you, Mommy."



And while we were driving today, she said...out of the blue, "I love you, Mommy." We were on a neighborhood street, so I stopped the car in the middle of the road so I could turn around to thank her for that. I believe that's the first time she's offered that sentiment with no encouragement. Such dearness:)

Hope your Saturday was a good one!

### **Jam taste testing extravaganza (2010-03-29 19:44)**

And the winner of the 2010 Haller jam tasting is...

...wait, I'll make you read the post before I tell you.

Last fall, Terry was traveling in Maine and found some wild blueberry jelly that he loved. You might even say that he went gaga for it. It got him thinking about jams and jellies, and...long story short...he ordered thirty jars of jelly from a handful of award-winning jelly makers so we could all taste them and determine our favorites.



In response, for the last several weeks, my siblings and I have all teased him relentlessly about how ridiculous it is for him to buy thirty jars of jam. However, I've retracted my taunts. Today's jam tasting was a lot of fun.

Alright, I did feel completely ill after forcing down the last eight or so pieces of jam covered toast, but the group taste testing experience was lively and exciting. Even the kids got into it. Andrew tried about eight types and carefully noted his score (always a five) on the score chart. Sylvia's face and hands were an amazing color of purple when it was all over...





For the jam tasting, each participant (there were seven of us) got a Hallerized score card upon which to grade our impressions of each of the 29 types of jam.

**Terry Jam Tasting - 3/27/2016**

Your Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: 1-Phenomenal, 4-Wonderful, 3-Excellent, 2-Fair Good, 1-Good, 0-Bad

No.	Jam Type	Maker	Rating Number (0-4 Max points)
		Burlington Commons	
1	Lemon Cord	Bonnie Mason	
2	Blackberry	Bonnie Mason	
3	Four Fruits	Bonnie Mason	
4	Wild Fruit	Bonnie Mason	
5	Wild Blueberry	Bonnie Mason	
6	Raspberry	Colorado Mountain Jam	
7	Apricot	Colorado Mountain Jam	
8	Organic Strawberry	Colorado Mountain Jam	
9	Organic Blueberry	Colorado Mountain Jam	
10	Organic Peach	Colorado Mountain Jam	

Here Terry demonstrates his jam tasting technique.









There were a lot of jams to taste. And they were all good!



The post-jam tasting counter was a sticky sensation. (The picture below shows half of the jars of jam. Another set wrap around the other side of the counter!)





After we rolled out of the kitchen with our blood sugar levels soaring, we tabulated the results. Yeah, that's right. The Babler family knows how to have fun. I am all about Saturday afternoons that involves spreadsheets. Ohhhh yeahhhh.



We determined the top rated jams by simple average. Although a part of me did want to run an Analysis of Variance test on that data!

Andrew busied himself with an iPhone.



And Sylvia tried on shoes that used to be Mareta's.



Now I'm sure that at this point, you're tense with expectation about what the winner is.

Well, I'll tell you.

It wasn't this one, though this one was quite good.



I didn't actually take a picture of the winning jam jar. So I'll steal a picture from Amazon...



Harvest Song Apricot Preserve was our winner!

As you can see below, I've listed our top favorites and least favorites.

Top 5:

Harvest Song Apricot  
Bonne Maman Blackberry  
Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Apple Pie  
Stonewall Kitchen Black Raspberry  
Bonne Maman Four Fruits

Bottom 5:

Harvest Song Sour Cherry  
Smuckers Blackberry  
Sarabeth's Kitchen Peach Apricot  
Harvest Song Peach  
Bonne Maman Wild Blueberry

The results were quite mixed since each tester has favorite flavors and preferences. Some people's favorite jam was others' least favorite.

Here are our seven tester's favorite jams.

Each tester gave a top score (5/5) to a different number of jams, so each tester has a different number of jams listed. Because all jams listed below were all given the same top score (except where indicated), they are listed in random order.

Lisa

Harvest Song Apricot  
Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Strawberry  
Stonewall Kitchen Wild Maine Blueberry  
Stonewall Kitchen Black Cherry  
Stonewall Kitchen Blueberry Peach

Joe

Harvest Song Apricot (5)

Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Apple Pie (5)  
Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Strawberry (4)  
Stonewall Kitchen Black Raspberry (4)  
Harvest Song Peach (4)

Terry  
Bonne Maman Blackberry  
Barefoot Contessa Lemon Curd  
Bonne Maman Wild Blueberry

Miranda  
Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Apple Pie  
Bonne Maman Wild Fruit  
Harvest Song Apricot

Althea  
Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Strawberry  
Bonne Maman Raspberry  
Stonewall Kitchen Strawberry Balsamic  
Stonewall Kitchen Apricot  
Stonewall Kitchen Black Raspberry  
Colorado Mountain Jam Organic Apricot  
Bonne Maman Four Fruits

William  
Stonewall Kitchen Black Raspberry  
Bonne Maman Four Fruits  
Harvest Song Apricot  
Bonne Maman Blackberry  
Stonewall Kitchen Black Cherry

Michael  
Harvest Song Apricot  
Bonne Maman Blackberry

\*\*\*\*\*

So what do you think? Does this sound like fun? Did we miss a jam or jelly or preserve that you love best of all? Does your family do somewhat odd activities like this?  
Mmmmm jam. Like sunshine in summer!

### **Kite flying with the uncles (2010-03-31 09:30)**

Joe left to head back to Bowdoin College on Sunday. We sure had a fun time visiting with him while he was home. Joe graduates in May, and I just made our flight and hotel reservations for our trip. It'll be fun to see his campus again. The last time I was there (almost five years ago!), Andrew was three months old and we were visiting the school as a prospective student (see the photo below of a younger Joe and my little peanut in his sling).





The day Joe left town, he and Michael stopped by, and we all headed over to Olbrich park for some quick kite flying, rock-jumping play time.







There's Michael...at home on top of the soccer goals just like when he was a kid.











And the walking on the rocks...









## 6.4 April

### Father's Day (March edition) (2010-04-01 07:41)

So Father's Day isn't actually scheduled until mid-June, but last Sunday we took an outing to the park, and my girl and her dad were certainly having a glorious time together:)









I just love this next picture. Oh, the cuteness!



One of the piers was pulled up on the shore, and Sylvia was racing down it and leaping into Byran's arms. I didn't get a shot of it, but she would just go flying off the end. That girl trusts her papa to catch her! And she's got a lot of jumping energy!



Bryan, you're going to need to post some of those images over on your Facebook page:)

## Ten years ago in Ann Arbor (2010-04-02 07:26)

It's been a glorious last couple days here in Madison. Yesterday, my car thermometer said it was 87 degrees. A nearby bank said 85. I don't think we hit 90 degrees all last summer, so for it to be in the mid-80s on April 1st...it seems like a crazy joke. A crazy, wonderful joke. I've got to get all my summer clothes up from the basement. I just discovered that I don't have any short-sleeved shirts in my closet.

And today is supposed to be just as lovely.

I woke up early this morning. Probably because I fell asleep at 8:30 while listening to a podcast on the couch. Bryan came home from his frisbee game and found me snoring away (I have a cold:) We were really active yesterday: bike riding, playground playing, warm-weather-worshiping! All that sunshine and exercise wore me out!

As I lay in bed early this morning listening to the birds singing their little brains out, I was thinking back to the first weekend in April, 2000 - a whole decade ago. Bryan and I had been married less than a year, and he was a month away from finishing his senior year at Carleton. I was working for the Off-Campus Studies Office. We had no cats, no pets, no kids. And we lived in a wonderful apartment above the Rare Pair in Northfield. Due to our lack of pets, I played Petz on the computer somewhat compulsively.



I had applied to environmental studies graduate schools around the country, and on that first weekend in April, Bryan and I hopped on a plane from Minneapolis and flew to Michigan to check out our new home: Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan. It was an exciting weekend, and parts of it are still so vivid in my mind because at the time, it was so unknown and exciting and important.

We rented a car for the first time...had a marital dispute about whether we should have purchased the rental insurance...and drove from the Detroit airport to lovely Ann Arbor. I still remember what the city looked like as it appeared around the corner; how my eyes soaked in the sites as we pulled off the Interstate and drove up State Street.

We were checking out the School of Natural Resources & Environment, looking for an apartment, and hoping to find some leads for Bryan to find a computer programming job. The weather was amazing. Flowers were blooming, trees were just starting to pop tiny green leaves, and the sky was blue with wispy white clouds. I later learned that while Spring does come nice and early in Ann Arbor, the spring skies are not often sunny and blue.

Our kittens, Bowser and Spooky would be born in May 2000 (we got them in July). As Bryan and I went from one large apartment complex to the next, we contemplated what part of town we wanted to live in, how much we could afford in rent, and what life would hold for us in this new sweet town.



For us, that weekend in Ann Arbor was a first step in our path into adult-hood. Stepping out together from the comfort of our college into the excitement and fear of the unknown. Ahh, the sweet memories!



### **Moving the website (2010-04-09 23:07)**

Hi Friends!

It's been a little painful for me not to post this past week. I feel like every few hours I think of something I want to write about. Last weekend, I went over to my brother, Michael's house, and he helped me get the ball rolling with moving my website to a new host.

Our work wasn't complete, though, and the last couple nights I've been negotiating with my computer, with SQL databases, and with login info that I long ago forgot.

I've already moved the content of my blog to the new site, so I haven't wanted to write more here, since it won't get transferred. Just so you know, you shouldn't have to change anything about your reading of my blog. But once I get things set up, I'll put a note here in case your rss feed or your bookmarks need updating. I'll still be happily found at [dotzourfamily.com](http://dotzourfamily.com).



Hope your week has been a good one. Wish me luck!

### **Easter...Lithuanian style (2010-04-10 23:33)**

I know that Easter was a whole week ago, but with my all my late-night website machinations, I've been hesitant to post something at the "old" location. So here we are...at the "new" location! Welcome! Is it faster? Probably not...but it was worth a try:)

Last weekend, Tom's friend Asta and her kids invited our family over to their home for Easter dinner. Asta's family is from Lithuania, and she prepared a wonderful feast for us.

Photos follow:

Here's the lovely table she set for us. The kids all got cute treat baskets.



Here's our buffet, stretched out along the counter.





Vinaigrette. It's a cold beet salad that was really tasty. We took home leftovers and devoured them the next day!



Lots of delicious dill in this meal. Here are some potatoes sprinkled with dill. We put the potatoes into our bowls and

then filled the bowl with Asta's terrific borscht.



I've had borscht several times, and I really enjoy it. This version was a pinker version, which was so festive for Easter!



Hey, I noticed that inserting those pictures went significantly faster than it has in the past. Just a few seconds per photo. That'll save me hours over the course of the year (given how many pictures I tend to include in each post!).

After our Easter dinner, we enjoyed a round of traditional Lithuanian egg cracking.



In all of Lithuania, the act of hitting Easter eggs is known and practiced, especially by men and teenagers. The egg is placed in the palm of the hand with thumb and forefinger holding the pointed end of the egg, which is the hitting area. The cracked egg is taken by the person whose egg did not crack in the process of hitting.

Lithuanian Customs and Traditions







Turns out that while Andrew and Sylvia both really enjoyed smashing eggs together, Tom was the winner with the hardest egg of the bunch.

Our Easter meal at Asta's was on Saturday, and then on Sunday morning, we had Alivia and Rayna come over for an Easter egg hunt in the yard. The four kids had a great time, as did the adults (who got to stand around and chat since the kids were so happily amused). Thus, no pictures were taken. We all ordered the traditional Easter pizza for lunch. Just kidding. I don't think I've ever had pizza for Easter lunch. But it was delicious. I recommend it:) Mmmm Glass Nickel Pizza. Mmmmmm.

I can't remember a March/April that has been this warm and spring-like! We're all soaking it in (and ignoring the snow that fell mid-week:)

Hope your Easter weekend was great!

### **Such a lovely weekend! (2010-04-11 20:42)**

We spent this weekend, idyllically, outdoors. Spring is really here. The willow trees have turned green, and our maple trees are sending out puffballs of spring green flowers from their buds.

Sylvia spent most of the weekend outdoors, naked. We worked on our gardens, planting peas and carrots and salad greens. I loved watching Sylvia's little fingers as she carefully placed the peas into the earth and then helped me "tuck them in."

On Saturday, we did our first family bike ride of the season. With Andrew on his tag-along bike behind Bryan and Sylvia in the trailer behind me, we biked four miles over to Tenney Park for some playground fun, duck watching, and a picnic. The sun was warm, and the weather was mild, and it kind of felt like we were living a dream. That dream included Sylvia screaming the whole way home, but some dreams are like that:)

I think we all got a little pink in the cheeks today, and while I'm chiding myself for not pulling out the sun screen, it feels so nice to have sun-kissed skin.

Website-wise, I spent a lots of my free time this weekend tweaking my newly moved website. I think of moving a website host a little like zapping one's apartment and moving it across town exactly as it was. And then running over and grabbing the old street sign and door numbers so your new apartment has the same address. But then you find that your phone doesn't work. Or the heat only goes on high. And so I've been working on the computer-equivalent of fixing those issues. My website had been [dotzourfamily.com/bryanandalthea](http://dotzourfamily.com/bryanandalthea) But in the move, we got rid of the /bryanandalthea. So that meant that a lot of links had to be changed, so I made friends with my sql database and learned some find and replace commands. Technical, tedious stuff. Yet so satisfying to get right in the end!

If you notice anything about my site that doesn't run as you'd expect, please let me know. Now tonight, I move [altheadotzourphotography.com](http://altheadotzourphotography.com) to its new home. Same address, new apartment. Wish me luck! This one should go faster if I learned something the first time around!

Since any post is better with a picture, here's one of the first dandelions of the season from my girl. We have lunch with Bryan on Fridays, and before having our picnic last week, we played around outside his office for a while. I snapped this picture of my cute girl on my phone.





**Relay for Life - Donation suggestion! (2010-04-12 16:46)**



Hi All! Here's a note from my brother Joe:

Bowdoin College is hosting a Relay for Life event this coming weekend and I'll be participating with some friends. I'm writing you all to ask if you had an interest in donating. If you don't know what Relay for Life is, it's the fund raising arm of the American Cancer Society. I've participated in Relay for Life in years past at De Forest High School and, if you've never been to an event, they're usually a lot of fun and a nice time to relax and reflect. At Bowdoin, we'll be locking ourselves in our indoor track from 8 pm to 8 am

and walking around the track, playing games, listening to live music, and doing our best not to fall asleep.

I'm only writing to give you an easy opportunity to donate to Relay for Life, not to ask that you donate on my behalf. I don't have any fund raising goals and don't care if my team raises zero or a thousand dollars. I simply think Relay for Life is a great organization. Mom actually went to a Relay for Life event a couple of months after she was diagnosed in 2005. She was wearing a wig at the time and we walked a few laps together. I think she was happy to be there and happy to have a community of people that were glad to see her.

If you do want to donate, the easiest thing to do is go to my Relay for Life page and fill in your credit card information and the amount that you want to donate. Otherwise, you can mail me a check if that's easier for you and I can make sure it gets to Relay for Life.

My address is: 33 Smith Union, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME 04011

Again, I'm only writing in hopes of giving the opportunity to make a donation, not out of a sense of fund raising pride. I just know that it's sometimes hard to remember to make donations so I wanted to give you all an opportunity. I hope everyone's April is going well!

Best,  
Joe

### **Wonderful weekend in Wichita (2010-04-18 22:28)**

Bryan's grandparents live in Wichita, Kansas, and last weekend, we flew out there for our annual visit.

Bryan was born in Wichita as were both his parents. Bryan's family moved to lovely Austin, Texas for much of elementary school, while his dad went to graduate school. When Bryan was about 9, they moved back to Wichita, and he lived there until going to college (to meet me!) in 1996. Bryan and I got engaged in Wichita in 1998. And although Bryan's parents don't live there anymore, we really enjoy going back to see his grandparents and aunts and uncles.

For the past five years, we've been making an annual April pilgrimage to Wichita. Twelve months is a lot of time to go between visiting with Andrew and Sylvia's great-grandparents, but we're grateful to get to spend the time with them that we do. As may be expected, I took a fair number of photos of our visit. Yes. Quite a few photos. They can be viewed in the gallery.

Here are a few of my favorites of our grandparents.

Here is Grandma Jo outside her home.



Three generations: Grandma Harvey with her daughter and granddaughter.



Sylvia and Grandpa Harvey. The two of them were so sweet together.



Here Sylvia is sitting on Grandma Harvey's lap, packing her toys into Melanie's pretty purse.







It is so fun to watch them all delight in each others' company!

Here's Grandpa Harvey chatting with Andrew.







And here are a few portraits I took.

Grandma Harvey



Grandpa Harvey (sans glasses)



Grandma and Grandpa (they are both turning 91 this year and celebrating their 76th wedding anniversary!!)



Grandma Joe, smiling and joking as always



I feel so lucky to have all these wonderful people in our lives. We miss Dandy...he passed away in 2007... What a treat to spend several days in the company of so many delightful family members. I loved watching Andrew and Sylvia interact with them all. More details about our trip (and photos too) are on their way!

**My girl picking flowers (2010-04-19 13:30)**



We spent last Friday afternoon hanging out at Grandma Jo's home. Sylvia got a pretty new pink dress (which she immediately put on), and then she went out in the backyard to run around. So cute!













**Birthday party...for whom? (2010-04-20 07:51)**

When we were in Wichita last weekend, Bryan's parents planned a little birthday shindig. The twist...it wasn't actually anyone's birthday! But since we don't tend to be together to celebrate birthdays (except for the kiddos), Bryan's parents threw a party for everyone!



We had balloons and cake...and even presents!





After several rounds of singing "Happy Birthday" and chowing down on some yummy BBQ take-out, we pulled out some party blowers and got silly:)









So today...whether it's your birthday or not...happy birthday! Have some cake:)

### **Soccer, Gator, and baby eyes (2010-04-21 07:27)**

While we were in Wichita last weekend, we had the pleasure of spending our Saturday evening with our friends Julie and Jerry. Bryan and Julie were good friends in high school, and it's always a treat when our Wichita visits include some time with them. Julie and Jerry have two boys. Grayson just turned five (so he's a few months older than Andrew) and Carter just turned one (so he's about a year younger than Sylvie).

The evening of our visit was warm and spring-ish, so we spent a lot of time outdoors. I took, well, a lot of pictures of Grayson and Carter. All of them can be seen (and downloaded if anyone's interested) in the gallery. My favorites are below.



While Andrew didn't remember Grayson from our visit last year, they played so sweetly together. After spending a few hours together, Andrew seemed to add Grayson to his internal "best buds" list.



There's baby Carter with his mama.



Dads with babes.



Looking up toward their front door.



Grayson has a John Deere Gator. They drove it all around the cul-du-sac. Andrew took a turn driving and did really well. Sylvia was really interested in taking a ride, but then when the time came, she had second thoughts:) It's a very big truck!



Carter was often walking with his hands up in the air. Such a cute baby move!



What a little doll.





Look at those eye lashes!?! Grayson has always had cheek-kissing lashes.



Carter walking up to mom and dad.





Grayson is riding his bike without training wheels, and boy, does he fly!



Andrew and Grayson had a lot of fun kicking the ball around the yard. Well, they mostly had a lot of fun. Grayson is a bit more skilled in the art of dribbling a soccer ball. Andrew got a lot of practice chasing him. Then they'd roll down the hill together.



Dad (and Sylvia) get into the action.



Julie and Jerry, it was such fun to spend the evening with you! I wish we could all play together a lot more often. Maybe we'll be able to plan a trip some day:)

### **Wichita pics - the final edition (2010-04-22 07:14)**

Here are a few final pictures from our Wichita trip.

Grandma Jo has this crazy wind-up bar tender from the late 1940s. He mixes a martini and then drinks it and then smoke comes out of his ears. Sylvia was fascinated and a little scared. She called him "coffee man" and said his coffee was "too hot."



Here's Granny and the kids playing with the balloons during the birthday party.



And here's Sylvia looking sweet. She found that stuffed dog at Grandma and Grandpa Harvey's on Friday, and it hasn't yet left her grasp.



Here's Sylvia setting up her toys to play. She is really getting into playing with stuffed animals and dolls and lawn ornaments. It's cute to watch!





I love this picture of Mark and his mom sharing a laugh.





Here's Bryan's two grandmas. Such sweet ladies!



Andrew loved that party blower. Here he is, a day later, and still giving it a good work-out.



This is my treasure from Grandma Jo. She works at a thrift store called Economy Corner, and every visit she gives us a variety of fun and/or silly gifts. This girl here (along with the bejeweled candle holder) may take the cake!



## 6.5 May

### **Where are you?? (2010-05-13 14:03)**

I've had several friends and family members send me notes the last week asking where on earth I was. Why wasn't I posting? How's life??

Well, friends, I have been busy. In the last two weeks, I've taken and mostly edited about 5,000 photos for Althea Dotzour Photography. Pictures of the Dotzour children during that time: 0.

In the last month, I think I've put more hours into my photography work than ever before. I've been sneaking in an hour or two of work during the day. I've asked friends to take my kids so I can get some time to work (thank you!!). I've been staying up until midnight or one or even two on a very regular basis. And the most amazing part (to me) is that I'm so productive. I'm not reading blogs or hanging out on Facebook (unless it's to "friend" and post pics of clients). I'm burning through my to-do lists. Despite my slight exhaustion, I am so happy. I love my work. Love love, passion, love!

However, while I've been preoccupied with my work, there's been quite a few events happening in our little world that I want to share.

The first is a sad one. Bryan's grandma...LuAnn's mom...suffered a bad stroke last week. She's been in the hospital since then, and this morning, she passed away. Bryan's mom has been in Wichita since last week, and it sounds like there's a good community who have been helping and supporting each other and Grandpa Harvey through this hard time. Grandma Harvey turned 92 a few days ago. And she's leaving behind a beautiful legacy. A 70-year marriage, three wonderful kids and lots of grand kids and great-grand kids. We're going to be flying to Wichita over the weekend. I believe the funeral will be on Monday.

I'm sorry that I didn't share news about Grandma Harvey earlier. For those of you who didn't know her, I knew her as a sweet, tiny grandma who simply adored her family. She and Grandpa were clearly so content and gentle and up-standing and honorable and loving. My heart goes out to Grandpa. It's got to be a tough thing to lose your life partner.

Sweet Grandma Harvey. We'll miss you. We're so glad we go to spend such a nice time together last month.

Here in Madison, Bryan's had a tumultuous week. He'd been approached about a new by a local company and spent the last few weeks interviewing. They offered him a position (Bryan's a software engineer) last week, and then he spent what felt like a month but was really only about four days trying to decide if he should stay at OpGen or if he should move. Two days ago (Tuesday), Bryan accepted the new job. He'll be working for an online designer retail company called ShopBop. It's owned by Amazon. So starting on June 7, he'll be going to a new place of employment. I'm really excited for him, and I hope he's challenged and inspired and that he has a great time. Their offices are much closer to our home, so that will be a nice change!

If you'd like to see a little of what I've been up to, visit my photography blog: <http://altheadotzourphotography.com/blog>

Lots of cute kids to see there! And if you're interested in booking a session with me this summer, contact me in the next couple weeks. My session fee goes up on May 31, so book now to get a low rate. And spread the word:)

Chow friends!

Althea

### **Father's Day mini-photo session (2010-05-16 17:36)**

Did you take a peek at the Mom & Me photography mini-sessions I did earlier this month (post 1, post 2, post 3)? So many flowers and so much fun! I just decided to offer a similar deal for dads.

Father's Day Photography Mini-Sessions

Hip hip hooray! It's almost Father's Day! As a special treat honoring grandpas and fathers and children, I'm offering a special Papa's generational mini-session on Sunday, June 6.

There's something so special about the way a father holds his child's hand. There's magic in the way children

can look up at their dads with such trust and belief in their eyes. I'm offering this mini-session to give you the opportunity to capture some of those interactions for your family albums.

x

Here's my boy Andrew and my dad!

Whether it's Dad with his kids or if Grandpa (and even Great-Grandpa!) join in, we'll have a fun time playing and capturing some images that your kids are sure to treasure.

This "Papas generational mini-session" event will be held on Sunday, June 6 at Tenney Park. Evening light is golden, and we'll get to explore around the lagoon, wander across bridges, and soak in all the sights and sounds of a June evening at the park. Dads, grandpas, and their little ones can reserve a 15-20 minute photo session, which will include at least 10 edited images and a personal online viewing and purchasing gallery for \$60. Prints and gifts will be available for purchase.

Moms, this would be a great Father's Day gift for Dad and Grandpa (they'll be thrilled to hear that it's not a stiff studio session!). Grandparents can be so hard to shop for, and this would be a lovely way to create memories that can be bottled up and looked at years later. Make it a fun evening with a trip to the Chocolate Shoppe afterward!

To see available time slots and to request an appointment, visit my website. Questions? Call me at 223.9539 or email [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com).

## 6.6 June

**Hi! I'm back! (2010-06-01 23:47)**

Dear Internet (friends and family),

I appologize for leaving you these last weeks. You've been on my mind. Occasionally, I write posts in my head about the cute things Sylvie is saying, the adorable way Andrew is being her big brother, the milestones that the kids are passing, the job changing that Bryan is going...and then I sit down and edit photos. Because that, my friends, is what I have been doing these last weeks. Fastly. Furiously. Editing. Photos. I finished the last of my Incredible Photography Month early last week, and then we packed up and headed for Maine for my brother Joe's graduation from Bowdoin College.

I was up until midnight or one or two every night for weeks (except when I collapsed a few times at 8pm). I had friends stopping in to help watch my kids so I could get a few extra hours of photo work in. It was intense...and

wonderful. I think I feel most happy and alive and energized when I am focused and productive and a little over-worked. It is a wonderful feeling. Thanks to all my lovely clients who help me get that excellent high:) And to my husband and friends for helping me meet my deadlines!

Our trip to Maine was wonderful...but that's another post. For now, I'll share a few tid-bits about our life these last weeks.

We went to Wichita a couple weeks ago for Bryan's mom's mom's funeral (that's Grandma Harvey). Sweet Grandma. Such a lovely person she was. Grandpa has since moved into an assisted living home with a lot of support from his kids. Although the purpose and reason for our trip was a sad one, it sure was pleasant to see all of Bryan's family again. Plus we got to see cousins who we don't see regularly. Andrew and Sylvia really enjoyed playing with Bryan's cousin's children, and we had some really companionable meals and get-togethers. Photos from Wichita are in the gallery.



Andrew had his last day of preschool at Monona Grove Nursery School. He is so excited about going to Kindergarten in the fall, he can barely wait. And he talks regularly about how Joe is graduating from college ("That means you've completed all the requirements," he says) and he has graduated from preschool. We (OK, maybe mostly I...Andrew's a kid who lives in the moment) am going to miss the teachers and kids and parents. Andrew's years at Monona Grove Nursery School have been really special. Luckily, Sylvia will attend preschool there in a year-and-a-half!

In April, Sylvia transitioned rapidly from diapers to undies. She's a big girl now. I haven't changed a poopy diaper in months. That, my friends, is a wonderful thing to be able to say. 4.75 years of diapers. She was dry at night for a couple weeks, and then we had lots of accidents, so I decided it was better for me to sleep well at night than for her to be totally diaper-free. Next step: a big girl bed. Not sure when, but it's coming:)

Andrew had a visitation for his new Kindergarten: Nuestro Mundo last week. While Bryan and I learned about Kindergartner's daily schedule, Andrew and the other soon-to-be kindergartners all went off to play with a teacher. He came back with a picture he'd colored of a frog. And he is SO EXCITED about his frog. And his new school. And

coloring more frogs at his new school starting September 1. Which, as far as he's concerned, can't come soon enough!

As a side note, do you know that kindergartners only get two recesses for part of the year? Then it's just one. And lunch plus recess is 45 minutes. That seems crazy. How are kids going to learn if they're in classrooms all day with such limited time to move and engage in free-play? And the lunch/recess time seems like it's setting kids up to shovel down their food as fast as possible. Seems like a bad idea. I liked this article on the importance placed on school lunch in France. But other than those things, the school seems like it's set up really nicely. It made me a little bit stunned and frankly, ill to watch Andrew bound up the Elementary School staircase. How did my baby become a boy?

Last week was also Eli's 5th birthday. We attended his birthday party and spent some time with him on his birthday morn. Photos of our playtimes are in the gallery. Andrew's pretty giddy about the fact that it is now June and his own birthday is coming up!







My sweetheart's birthday was a couple weeks ago. We were in Wichita for his birthday, and then when we returned home that week, we celebrated his birthday in lots of little ways. The highlight was when we showed Bryan the hammock we'd gotten for him. Andrew kept the secret for weeks, and Bryan was really excited.



Bryan's last day of work at OpGen was last Wednesday. Thanks to all his co-workers for giving him a great send-off:) He's home with us all the rest of the week, and then he starts his new job on Monday, June 7.

I took lots of photos during our trip to Maine. Stay tuned!

Althea

## Maine Vacation - Part I: Playing with my fam (2010-06-03 07:00)

Vacation Time!

Bryan, Andrew, Sylvia, and I flew out to Maine on Thursday, May 27. We've been anticipating this vacation for months, and we were all so excited. The kids now love waking up "in the middle of the night" (somewhere between 3:30 and 4:30am) to go on trips. We had a long day of travel with layovers in Detroit and LaGuardia. However, Sylvia has really turned a traveling-corner, and both kids were champs. We flew with my dad, and fortunately we all got in to Portland with all our bags (to avoid the checked bag fees, we had four suit cases and three backpacks. Plus two carseats checked. So much stuff!). We met up with Terry, Tom, my sister Maretta and her husband Kyle (who live in St. Paul), my brother Michael and his wife Lisa, and our friends/"cousins" Heather, Michael, and little Evelyn (who live in DC). For those of you who are counting, that makes 14 of us including Joe. Quite a crew!



I love being together with my family. Makes me so happy. I think we all particularly missed having Mom here for this occasion. She's our hub, and she would have so enjoyed the weekend and the successful launching of her last little chick.





Terry found us some wonderful cottages to rent about 20 minutes from Bowdoin. I think it's fair to say that I was blown away by them. They were beautifully decorated. The kitchen was amazing. The details were so thoughtful and well-crafted. And yet they had a nice cottage, not-too-big feel. The 14 of us split between two cottages (we stayed at Cottage #516; The Calderwood), and we spent some lovely hours in the evening sitting by the fire or chatting on the porch looking out at the river.



On Friday, we visited Bowdoin and explored a little of Maine. Terry took me and Maretta and Heather to a wonderful yarn shop called Halcyon Yarn. It was by far the biggest, most well-stocked yarn store I've ever had the

pleasure of browsing. Apparently they do most of their sales via internet and catalog, so look them up! Terry found some un-spun cashmere fiber ( \$185/lb) that we enjoyed petting for a little while. Maretta got a set of the Addi Turbo interchangeable knitting needles, and Heather got a book on knitting two socks at a time. A very Heather thing to do:) I got a kit to make felted balls with the kids. Such pretty colors! Should be fun!



Then we met up with the rest of the gang, and Joe gave us a tour of Bowdoin and showed us his dorm. Now the last time I was at Bowdoin, Joe was a high school senior and Andrew was three months old (see the album here!). Joe loved Bowdoin, but he was rather scared out of his mind that he wouldn't get in. So it was really cool to have my second visit to Bowdoin be my happy brother showing us around the campus he has grown to know and love so much. I'm really proud of him!



Wow! This post is getting long. I'm going to take a break and come back at you with more details tomorrow. In the meantime, if you'd like to see more pictures from our first day in Maine, you can see them (all 100 of them from day 1) here!

### **Maine Vacation - Part II: Visiting the coast (2010-06-04 07:13)**

If you missed Part I, you can find it here! I'll start you out with a slideshow of photos of our first day in Maine. There's 100...sorry, I usually edit things down more, but I couldn't. I think 25 is a great number of photos to share. 100 is just me being lazy:)

[EMBED] After our Bowdoin College visit, Joe got us some yummy sandwiches from the Big Top Deli - The Goose sandwich was delicious and contained key words including "Gouda" and "avocado." Yum! We took our sandwiches and drove from Brunswick to Lands End on Bailey Island...about 20 minutes from Joe's school.



IFRAME: [http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d&source=s\\_d&saddr=Brunswick,+ME&daddr=Bailey+Island,+ME+04003&hl=en&geocode=FRwVngld8GnU-ym\\_dKObSYetTDGPEZEpiMvO9w%3BFXVemwldr\\_nT-ymBEEcg7nutTDHqAM78GZGc3g&mra=ls&sl=43.89132,-69.95008&sspn=0.402795,0.941391&ie=UTF8&ll=43.825595,-69.95008&spn=0.17805,0.0883&output=embed](http://maps.google.com/maps?f=d&source=s_d&saddr=Brunswick,+ME&daddr=Bailey+Island,+ME+04003&hl=en&geocode=FRwVngld8GnU-ym_dKObSYetTDGPEZEpiMvO9w%3BFXVemwldr_nT-ymBEEcg7nutTDHqAM78GZGc3g&mra=ls&sl=43.89132,-69.95008&sspn=0.402795,0.941391&ie=UTF8&ll=43.825595,-69.95008&spn=0.17805,0.0883&output=embed)

[View Larger Map](#)



Then we picnicked next to the ocean. Ahh...



After a day of air and car travel, spending several hours exploring a rocky, ocean shore was just the ticket. We adjusted our schedule so we could stay and play longer.





My brothers took Andrew down the rocky shore for some adventure, and Sylvia and I dipped our toes in the chilly salt water.







We hunted for sea glass and found lots of beautiful rocks and tiny shells. After carefully collecting a pile of our favorites, the kids gleefully hurled it all into the sea.



The kids and I had fun dipping our fingers in the water and tasting it. "Salty!!!"




We got a perfect day of weather for our outing. Sunny, a little breeze. Our lungs full of ocean air.

### **Maine Vacation - Part III: LL Bean and Lobsters (2010-06-05 07:10)**

[Click here for Part I and Part II to hear the start of our story!](#)

...After spending the afternoon at Lands End, we split our group. Joe and Dad and Terry and Michael went to Joe's Baccalaureate ceremony at Bowdoin. The rest of us drove over to Freeport to visit the LL Bean mothership store.

 Photo from the wikipedia commons

Joe and I had visited the store back in 2005, and for the past five years, as I browse their catalog, I've thought to myself, "I won't order that now...I'll wait until I go visit Joe and get it at the store!" Well, it turns out that I never did visit Joe at school (sniff!), but I took full advantage of visiting the store this time.





I got the kids fleecy-lined hoodies (orange and purple). Evelyn got a pink one. I got a pretty green shirt for myself. That'll be my version of our Maine souvenirs. Sylvia was tired (no nap for two days) and really, really, really wanted some pink flip flops that she found. So she threw a class III tantrum as we were departing. Ahh well. Memories.

From LL Bean, we traveled back to Bowdoin where we met up with the Baccalaureate crew (who were running late because the fire-alarm had been pulled mid-ceremony by a wayward child) and headed to the all-school Lobster Bake.



Ahh, lobsta.





Sylvia had a bite of lobster and liked it, but then she didn't want any more. She was much more interested in eating just plain butter (see below as she finishes off a pat). I sit nearby pretending not to watch.



So that finished off our first full day in Maine!



We headed back to the cottages to put the kids down for bed and to relax. Joe headed back to his dorm for his last  
1316

night as a student with his college friends. Good night, Maine! Thank you for sharing a wonderful day.



#### Maine Vacation Part IV: Graduation Day (2010-06-06 07:05)

[Click here for Part I, Part II, and Part III](#) to hear the start of our story!

Friends. One thing I found remarkable about visiting Bowdoin College and seeing a bit into Joe's college experience was meeting his friends. I went to Carleton College, which is a similar kind of place, and Joe and I are relatively similar kinds of people, but while I had perhaps four close friends and seven good friends at college...maybe two of whom I keep in close contact with (Hi Sarah and Wes!), Joe seems to have a large, very close community of friends who clearly adore each other. I don't think I've ever seen so much affection at a graduation before!



Joe's graduation was held outdoors on their lovely campus. The graduates and teachers and alumni walked all around campus before the ceremony.





While we sat and listened, the three little kids did very well (Andrew played on iPhones the entire time and Sylvia enjoyed some nice packages that Heather had put together for the girls).





There are 105 photos from graduation, and you can find each and every one of them here. If you're so inclined, here's a slideshow!

[EMBED] The speeches were all well done. I particularly enjoyed the student's speeches. Here's Joe receiving his diploma:



And our new, official graduate.



The paperwork...



Now for some pics of our graduate with the fam. Here's Joe and Terry:



And Joe and Dad:



Joe and the kids:





Joe and me:



The four kids and Dad:



Joe and Maretta ham it up. They're soooooo dramatic:) More pics of this charade in the gallery.



Joe with the Lerners. Joe, you kinda tower over them.



Sweet, sleepy Evie.



Joe with brothers, cousin, and nephew..."the boys."





After this little family photo session, we met up with Joe's friends and Marettta and I followed him around like paparazzi. Hugging ahead!











Here's Joe with this year's roommates: Marc, Sasha, and Lindsey  
1328



And an earlier set of roommates:



Here's his larger group of friends. I think most of them lived on the same dorm floor this year.



Here are the friends he might live with in DC:



More friends; more hugging:









Joe, I am so glad that you had such a loving group of people with whom to surround yourself these last four years. From our brief time together, they all seem like wonderful people. I wish them all the best!!

**Maine Vacation - Part V: Up to Bar Harbor (2010-06-07 07:19)**

[Click here for Part I, Part II, Part III, and Part IV to hear the start of our story!](#)



After Joe's graduation on Saturday, he packed his belongings into a truck, said goodbye to his friends, and joined our family at the cottages. The next morning, Joe drove down to Washington DC, where he will have an internship this summer...living with Heather and Michael. Terry, Dad, Tom, Michael, Lisa, Maretta, Kyle, Heather, Michael, and Evie all drove down to Portland to catch their airplanes. And Bryan, the kids, and I hopped in our car and headed north for our further adventure.

The drive was just beautiful! Little New England towns sprinkled along the coast. Peeks through the woods at the ocean and islands. Harbor towns with white church spires rising above the green forest, beautiful homes, and sailboats and colorful buoys dotting the deep blue water. I think that on our three-hour drive, our favorite little town was Camden. So pretty! So picturesque! Wish we could have stayed there for a while. It actually reminded us a lot of Bayfield, Wisconsin on Lake Superior!

When we arrived at Bar Harbor (a town on Mt. Desert Island where Acadia National Park is located), we stopped for lunch at a lovely outdoor cafe. Andrew colored on a children's menu, and that menu came with us for the rest of our journey. Andrew declared (dozens and dozens of times) that it was a map that could tell us how to go all ways. At one point, we asked for some wisdom from the all-knowing map. Andrew said, "The lobster on the map says we should turn left. ... Or right. ... .. Or maybe go straight ahead."

For a look at a real map of the park, [click here](#).





Following the map's advice (or maybe not), we traveled down to Sand Beach in Acadia National Park. Most of the coast line is really rocky, but in this cove, the beach was long with rough sand. It was full of people...I can't imagine what it must look like during the real tourist season!



Sylvia was really worried about the water, so she and I sat on the beach and tried to keep the sand from getting on her (for some reason that became really important to her). Andrew, meanwhile, was at the shoreline chasing the waves and then running from them. I was busy with Sylvie, so I wasn't able to get any pictures of Andrew, but he was so gleeful and joyful. Over the course of the hour we were there, he played with lots of different kids as they ran toward and away from the waves. Oceans are so cool!



He had a little adventure at one point when he waded in a bit and the undertow pulled him down. Before he could get up, a big wave splashed over him and pushed him up the shore...covering him with sand. Bryan pulled him



up right away, and it took him a moment to decide whether to be stunned or cry. While he did cry a bit, he was back on the shore a bit later, having a blast...his scalp and ears full of gritty sand. That night, the tub looked like a beach.



After getting mostly dried off, we took a little trek up the Beehive trail. Unlike some of the other trails we'd walked down, the part of the Beehive we hiked was made up of large boulders. Bryan or I carried Sylvia, and Andrew bounded ahead. He reminded me a little of a dog who is given the job he was bred to do. A hound who's been taken pheasant hunting or a collie who's been given some sheep. My little Andrew man was hopping about on those boulders like a mountain goat who has finally been released on a mountain. It was a lot of fun to see.

I didn't take my camera on that hike, but here's a couple of us walking on some flat terrain...





After our hike, we drove past some really lovely ocean views back up past Bar Harbor to supper at a Lobster Pound. There, we enjoyed the largest lobsters I have ever seen in my life. One of them had a claw that had to be a pound on its own.



This lobster pound was a neat place. You stand in a line and order your lobster at the counter. They stick the yummy crustaceans in these outdoor pots to boil. You stand around for the 25 minutes or so that it takes for them to cook, and then you grab a picnic table or one of the little tables inside and chow down. Expensive. Casual. SO YUMMY. The kids weren't too adventurous, but that just left more lobster for me and Bryan to devour. And chow down, we did.





Well past the kids' bedtimes, we rolled into our hotel, checked in, and got them to bed. Sylvia slept in a bed for the first time. There was actually a very nice crib for her to sleep in, but the room also had two twin beds, and she

1340

wanted to be just like Andrew. While it took the kids a long time to settle down and go to sleep, they finally did, and I passed out while reading my book. What a great day it was!

### **Maine Vacation - Part VI: Relaxing at Acadia (2010-06-08 07:57)**

[Click here for Part I, Part II, Part III, Part IV, and Part V to hear the start of our story!](#)

Monday was our last full day in Maine. We woke up in our Bar Harbor hotel and headed out to Jordan's to eat some Maine wild blueberry pancakes with Maine wild blueberry syrup. A local couple sitting at a nearby table struck up a conversation, and they suggested we go try out the Wonderland trail. Since the gentleman was a Bowdoin grad, we decided to follow his advice. I'm glad we did!

The Wonderland trail was a nice 40 minute drive away, and we really enjoyed getting to see the landscape as we traveled. One surreptitious aspect of our Maine visit is that it coincided exactly with the peak of lupine blossoms. I'm a big fan of Barbara Cooney's book *Miss Rumphius* (I'd bought it the last time I was in Maine), so to happen to be here at a time when lupines are covering the gardens and roadsides and knolls with purple and pink and white blooms was just fantastic. They are the bluebonnets of Maine!

x







I'm a little worried that they aren't native and I'm actually reveling in the beauty of an invasive non-native, but as a tourist, I think I'll just enjoy my ignorance:) Was Miss Rumphius making the world more beautiful or was she propagating invasives? Shoot. Darn you internet.

OK, on to other things...

We drove along, stopping to play on the rocks.





Sylvia needed close supervision to ensure her safety, but she also loved playing all the rocks!







Such pretty granite!





At the Wonderland beach, we spent several hours exploring, sitting, and looking into the tide pools. We found snails,

oysters, lots of sea grass and kelp, and a flock of Eider ducks grunting just off shore.



While Andrew roamed far and wide, Sylvia found a couple tiny rocks that she decided were babies. She put them to bed, would wait a while, and then would go wake them up. She'd cradle them in her hands and talk and sing to them. No doll needed for this little girl:)





After wonderful Wonderland, the kids slept in the car while I shopped a bit alone in Bar Harbor. We all went to lunch, and I learned the pleasure of clams dipped in butter. At first, I didn't know to take off the "neck." The first one I ate was full of grit, and it was almost the last one I ate. But then my waiter showed me how to remove the neck and dip it in brine and then in butter. And I was hooked. I can't think of something yummier. Of course, I could try dipping all sorts of food in butter and test, but steamed clams are now one of my favorite foods.

After lunch, we piled back in the car and drove the 2-3 hours back to Portland. The kids did a great job with all our traveling, and while we were driving Bryan and I made a list of the 15 or so places we'd like to take the kids. Now that they're getting a little older, it seems like it will be fun!

\*\*

We woke up at 4:30am on Tuesday for our flight home. The kids were, once again, delighted to be waking up in the middle of the night to travel:) Despite getting stuck at LaGuardia for several extra hours due to a variety of mechanical issues, and thereby missing our flight from Detroit to Madison, we were able to get home only a couple hours after our scheduled flight.

Andrew has wistfully said several times, "I loved Acadia National Park!"

I feel so lucky that we were able to take them on that adventure. Thanks, Joe, for picking a college in such a beautiful state!

Now we're home for June...a month of birthdays and anniversaries! Thanks for reading about our trip:) I

hope it was a little vacation for you too!

Althea

### **Andrew's famous (2010-06-10 11:01)**

Well, maybe he's not really famous, but you can see him a couple times on this video clip put together for Monona Grove Nursery School.

They made it last year, and it's amazing to see how young Andrew and his classmates all look to me. I guess he was still three at the time!

[EMBED]

### **Playing with Dad (2010-06-11 07:01)**

Father's Day is coming up in a couple weeks, but my kids don't need a special day to shower their daddy with love. In fact, if their affections were a real rain shower, he'd be soaked.



The light was so pretty a few nights ago, we did a little photo session. More pics are in the gallery.











Then the kids decided to act like manic wrestlers.







After the grunting and roaring, there was some cuteness.





You may have noticed that it looks like Andrew has drawn all over his body with markers. This is, in fact, what he has done. He was apparently being Boewolf, the ancient warrior. He informed me several times that he was mean. This could be told by the hearts with arrows through them well as by the unhappy faces =( that he had drawn all over his legs. Creativity and imaginative play thrives here at the Dotzour home!

### **Meeting Zachary (2010-06-12 07:16)**

My friend Kathy lives in California. We went to graduate school together at the University of Michigan, and along with Grace and Jennifer, we worked for two years on a master's project at the Brookfield Zoo. Our master's project was a lot of fun. The things that kept us happy and sane throughout that long effort was common friendship, a love of food, and lots and lots of baked goods.

I last saw Kathy in 2007 when we all met up for a reunion in Austin (see post here). Since then, she's gotten married and we've both had a child. Life happens! Kathy's husband Eddie is doing a lot of traveling for work these days, and they are all located in Chicago this week. So on Sunday afternoon, they were nice enough to make the drive up to Madison to visit us. It was great to see Kathy and Eddie and such a treat to meet sweet little Zach.



I brought my camera as we played at Olbrich park and caught a few images. That little boy sure does feel exuberantly happy about the water!

























On Tuesday, the kids and I packed up and drove down to Chicago to spend the day at the Brookfield Zoo with Kathy and Zach. The day was rainy, but we had so much fun visiting the Hammil Family Play Zoo, the Swamp, Tropic World, and the new Bear & Bison exhibit. I'm heading down to Chicago for a workshop this weekend, so I'm hoping to get to spend a little more time with Kathy before she leaves. It's always fun to get together!

### **Grandma Harvey's lovely obituary (2010-06-13 07:19)**

Back in the days pre-2007, back before my mom, my two grandparents, Bryan's grandpa, and Terry's dad passed away, I hadn't given a lot of thought to obituaries. Or stories written about a person's life. But in the last few years, I've become much more aware of how challenging and important it feels to me to write and talk about a person when they're gone. Andrew and Sylvia didn't get to spend much/any time with important people whom I loved and whom have passed. That means that it's up to me and others who knew them to share stories about and to make them present in our lives.

Grandma Harvey (Bryan's mom's mom) passed away last month, and the pastor wrote up and delivered a really lovely funeral service. In preparation, she talked to family member and read a memory book that Grandma Harvey wrote, and wove together some lovely words that painted a wonderful picture of kind, sweet Lola Mae Harvey. I asked Pastor Kim to send me a copy of her notes, and I'll share them for you here. I hope you can sit back take a moment to read this, because then you too will hold memories of Grandma Harvey in your heart, and the more people who know and love her and Grandpa, the better.

Thanks to Pastor Kim for sharing this with me!

Lola Mae Harvey's Funeral Service

Pastor Kim Dickerson

Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Wichita, KS

May 17, 2010

One of Lola Mae's favorite childhood memories was to lie down in the grass with her sister, Lucille and her brother, Melvin in the late evening. They would watch the stars and make up stories together. "It was so peaceful," Lola Mae said. This experience impacted Lola Mae, and made the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm one of her favorite bible verses. She said that it seems that heaven would have green pastures and quiet time. As I read Psalm 23, I invite you to hear the section about the green pastures in a new way knowing how important the scripture and experience was to Lola Mae.

Psalm 23

Proverbs 31: 10-31

Ode to a Capable Wife. Obituary Lola Mae Blue Harvey was born May 6, 1919 to Edward and Mabel Blue in Wichita, KS. Lola Mae writes that she was most thankful in her childhood that she had parents who loved God, who loved and

respected each other, and also loved and respected their children. While they had very few material things, they still had fun. She grew up during the depression, and she had to make up most of her own games. Lola Mae enjoyed playing paper dolls that she would cut out of the catalog. All of her dolls had names and she played school with them. And she enjoyed passing this game on to her children and her grandchildren. I was told Lola Mae even would put rouge on the family's chickens and dress them up and play with them. Her favorite chicken had a broken wing, and it was a devastating day when a chicken with a broken wing ended up on the dinner table. She didn't eat that night. She was a good student. She loved school and spelling bees. Growing up, she enjoyed running and swinging on limbs. Walking on stilts, jumping rope and throwing the ball against the garage and catching it. She enjoyed the times her family would stand around the piano and sing hymns. She had two older brothers, Vernard and Melvin, and one older sister, Lucille. Lola Mae also enjoyed baseball, and she would surprise all the ladies in the beauty shop when she would ask for the sports page. She was the only lady who cared at all for that section of the paper. She liked going to games at Lawrence Dumont stadium, and she was a Braves fan. When she was 14 or 15 years old, she met her husband of 70 years, Forrest Lowell Harvey, who survives her. They met while in the opening exercises of Sunday school. Forrest says that on the day they began talking to one another, there was another boy who wanted to sit beside Lola Mae, but Forrest got there first. He said about Lola Mae, "She took my eye. I wasn't going to lose her." Lola Mae wrote in her book of memories that she liked Forrest because "he was a real nice boy, neat and clean." They were married on August 27, 1939 at Bethel Methodist Church in Wichita KS during opening exercises because they could not afford a regular wedding. Forrest had worked all night at the Beacon. He got home around 6:30am, and the wedding was at 9:30am. Their honeymoon was spent going to the Blue family reunion in Blackwell, OK. It was a one-day honeymoon, as Forrest had to go to work the next day. The love that Forrest and Lola Mae shared with each other is something that anyone who knew them could recognize. The children and grandchildren especially appreciate the model for a loving marriage that the couple showed them. As LuAnn put it, "Some older couples have one of them walking in front, and one of them walking in back. But they always walked arm and arm." This was true. I had the pleasure of greeting them as they left the sanctuary every Sunday, and Lola Mae always was on Forrest's arm, and you could tell that they had a very sweet love for one another. Forrest said many times as we prepared for today, that "she was a wonderful little girl, a peach." Throughout their marriage, Lola Mae would make a couple of pies and a cake each Saturday, and then some of Forrest's friends from work would come over and when she would get up on Sunday, a lot of her dessert was missing. Pies and cakes, rolls and cookies were things that Lola Mae was known for. This is a tradition she kept up well into her old age—something her family will remember her for. Forrest and Lola Mae enjoyed square dancing. They square danced and round danced until they were 80 years old. One of their favorite trips was to Alaska in 1989 with a square dance group. They also enjoyed playing cards with friends. Lola Mae was very musically talented. She could play anything by ear. She played for opening exercises in Sunday School. She also played once at a McDonalds restaurant. They were with a tour group and someone asked if anyone could play the piano, and she volunteered. She had the entire restaurant singing old time songs. As the family shared with me, when you looked at Forrest and Lola Mae, you would think they were prim and proper, but they loved to be silly as well. She was spunky, and even ornery. She surprised her family once when she told them about the time she put on a show as a one-woman band. She played the drum, the harmonica and the piano all at the same time. But Lola Mae would downplay it if you said she was talented. She was very modest. To Forrest and Lola Mae were born three children, Larry Harvey of Augusta who is married to Susan; Don Harvey of Wichita, married to Cheryl; and LuAnn Dotzour of College Station TX, married to Mark. All of her children survive. Lola Mae writes that the happiest times in her life were "when they were raising their family. Each child as so different and so special." She was a caring mother, who wrote, "There is nothing as sweet as the way a baby looks up at you when you're feeding it it's bottle. It's like it's saying, 'I know you love me and are going to take good care of me.'" Larry said that as kids, their home was a gathering place. Lola Mae enjoyed knowing where her kids were, and if they were all at her home, she felt the best. She was wound a little tight, when it came to her children. The serenity prayer was her favorite prayer, but she found it hard to let go of her worry about the welfare of her children. She was a loving mother, but she also had high expectations of her children. Once when Larry took ice cream from the kitchen for himself and his friend, she got after him and said, "There are other people in the world other than you." She wanted her children to be considerate. Another time when LuAnn had gotten in trouble at school, but fibbed about why she was late getting home, Lola Mae got after her for lying. She was a loving mother, and also a loving mother-in-law. Cheryl, Susan and

Mark all said that she was the best mother in law you could ever have. Lola Mae was a homemaker for most of her life. She also worked in the school cafeteria for a time. Lola Mae was a great seamstress. She made most of her children's clothing. She even made a prom dress for Debbie. She made most of her own clothes until she was in her 70's, at least, maybe longer. And, she was very particular. If it wasn't done correctly, she would rip it out and do it over. She was also a great teacher. She would teach LuAnn how to cook and clean and do the laundry: some of the happiest times LuAnn remembers spending with her mother. Lola Mae even shared her knowledge with the young women of the Ruth Circle, in which her daughter, LuAnn participated. She taught them how to make homemade noodles. In addition to her three children, Lola Mae has seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. She was a wonderful grandmother who would intentionally lose at every card game she played with her grandchildren. Her grandchildren remember how she showered them with love. How she called every camera a Kodak, no matter the brand. How she came to a Valentine's party at school and read all the valentines. How she would fret that the pies and rolls might not be good enough, even though they always were the best. How she was always so well dressed and classy, even though she would never admit it. How she never said a negative thing about anyone—she always saw their good side. How she was such a gracious hostess. How her dog cookie jar always was filled with something special. If Forrest and Lola Mae could choose the best way to spend their time, the best activities to take part in, it would have been the times they spent with their family. Not too long ago, the entire family was sitting in a circle in the living room, talking. And even though Forrest and Lola Mae may not have been able to follow along fully in the conversation, they were beaming that their loved ones were around them. Forrest leaned over to Lola Mae with a huge smile and said, "Look, they are all here." And that made them so happy. The highlight of her life was when everyone got together. She was so proud of each and every one of them. Faith was a vital part of their lives. Forrest and Lola Mae were members of Bethel UMC, which later became St. Luke's UMC. Each Sunday after church, the couple called on the people in the hospital. It was their ministry to take cards to the people who were hospitalized that the Congregation would sign. In November of 2006, they joined Aldersgate UMC. It has been such a pleasure to see them each week, and be a witness to their love for one another, and also a witness to their love for God and the church. Lola Mae passed away peacefully with her family at her side on Thursday, May 13, following a stroke. Memorials have been established with Aldersgate UMC and Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice. Message In Galatians 5:22-25 we read, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, Let us also be guided by the Spirit." As I have listened to the family's stories about Lola Mae, and read through her very thoughtful book of memories that she completed for her family, I believe Lola Mae throughout her life was moving on toward perfection (as the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, might say). She was moving on to perfection, or wholeness, moving on to Sanctification, and throughout her life yearned to allow the Holy Spirit to fill her with the fruits of the Spirit. As I listened to the stories, I heard so many that shared examples of her love her joy and peace, her patience and kindness, her generosity and faithfulness, her gentleness and self-control. And I believe that she was able to share this because of her deep faith in God. In the book of memories, one of the early questions was, "When did you first go to church? What are your earliest memories?" She replied that church had been important to her all of her life. She remembered sitting in little chairs in a circle at Sunday School. She remembered the dignified ushers. She remembered the choir, and the big voices some of them had. She wrote that she always felt like she was a Christian, but that she and Forrest went forward at a revival service when they were about 15 years old to once again profess their faith. Their faith was one not necessarily lived out through a lot of talking about the faith, but by actually living their faith. Lola and Forrest would hold hands and say grace before every meal. And there was a Bible always beside Lola Mae on the table. The family shared stories with me about how gifted and talented Lola Mae was, but they were very quick to point out that she always wanted to find ways to improve herself. She knew that to be a follower of Jesus, she must be humble. She may have been a little too humble, as her family has shared, and not realized what a true gift she was. She was so talented, but you would never hear her say that, and if you would say something to that affect, Lola Mae would downplay her strengths and say that she had a long way to go. And even though she was an extremely beautiful and classy lady, Lola Mae definitely believed she was not perfect. She would sometimes cut her face out of family photos. Forrest says of his wife, "She can never imagine how much she meant to me. I wanted her to know that she was perfect for me." We pray that now that she is with her Savior in heaven, that he is showing her what a perfect wife, mother, perfect grandmother and woman, perfect

and beautiful Christian she truly is. Made perfect because of God's love and grace. Made perfect because she allowed the Holy Spirit to mold her heart, and grace her with the gifts of the Spirit. Through her faithful life, Lola Mae shows each and every one of us how faith is lifelong journey. It is not something to take for granted, but it is something that should be nurtured throughout a lifetime. One of the ways that Lola Mae found to best express her faith was through her gift of music. Even though her parents could not afford to send her for music lessons, she received a natural gift from God. Throughout her life, even up until the time of her stroke, God would put a song in her heart. She would hum a tune around the house and, it would stay in her head until she sat down to play it. When she would go to the piano, she would smile and play. The song that Lola Mae would play the most in her later years was "The longer I serve him, the sweeter He grows." The words are "Since my life He controls, since I gave my heart to Jesus, the longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows." All who knew Lola Mae would agree that the longer she served him, the sweeter she did grow. She had a heart of a true servant of Christ. Her grandchildren and children remember how it was so important to Lola Mae that the porch be swept off before anyone came over. She was always looking for a way to serve other people. When the grandkids stayed at her house, she would turn down the covers and lay out their nightclothes. When the grandkids were in college, she would send them care packages filled with buttery sugar cookies. Lola's favorite advice was from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late." This is how she lived out her life. I think Lola Mae would encourage each and every one of us here to live this out. As she did. She would encourage us to live out the fruits of the spirit. To serve one another. She would want her family to continue to spend time together with Forrest. She would want us to love one another, just as her Savior loved her. She would ask that we remember her great love and commitment over any of her accomplishments. May we all learn from Lola Mae's life, may we all continue to work towards perfection in wholeness. And may we all experience the assurance that God loves us, just as we are, but too much to leave us here. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

### **Sylvie's cuteness (2010-06-15 22:17)**

While I was in Chicago last weekend, Bryan took this cute video of Sylvia. Just a little snapshot of our little girl right now. She's 28 months old. What a fun place we are in right now!

[EMBED]

### **My boy is five! (2010-06-22 00:18)**

365 days ago, I wrote the following post as Andrew was on the eve of his fourth birthday. Right now, my clock says June 21, 11:58pm. In a few more moments, my little guy will be five. An energetic, focused, exuberant Five. When you're raising kids, the hours do sometimes gooo soooo sloooow, but the months, they fly by on zippy wings. Andrew is still so much the little boy he was at two and three and four, and yet, when I look back at photos or videos, I can see just how much he's changed. In the past year, he's grown more aware of the world outside his own skin, and yet, he's still so very content to do his own thing. He sometimes adjusts to unfamiliar situations with a calm that surprises me. He's gotten funnier and punnier, and the knock knock jokes keep on comin'.

In the last 12 months, Andrew's leapt into reading. He started with Gerald and Piggy books, and these days, he can read just about anything he wants. Too many words on a page frustrate him, but he reads Sylvia all her picture books...an activity that makes my heart fill and overflow. Andrew loves to do art projects, to help cook in the kitchen, and to work (endlessly?!) on his workbooks. Physically, he loves to climb trees, he is experimenting with the idea of

giving up his bike's training wheels, and he's almost able to paddle a few feet in the pool. I imagine that in a year, we'll be at a whole different place!

While his mind is growing and his limbs are strengthening, my little Andrew man is still such a cuddlebug. He wakes up in the morning and wants to snuggle. Occasionally he still tucks his arms down between us when we hug, just like he used to when he was tiny. He glows with love toward me and Bryan and Sylvia. I feel so very lucky that he is my golden haired boy.

Andrew, you were a terrific four-year-old. You were so easy and fun and amazing to me this past year. And now you are brim-full of excitement about Kindergarten. I look forward to spending the next year with your five-year-old self.

And if I was your fairy godmother and could grant you a few sparkling qualities on your birthday, I would wish for you health and compassion and resiliency and kindness and curiosity. Happy birthday, my dear boy!



### **Andrew's 5th Birthday party (2010-06-24 11:33)**

Last weekend, Andrew had a fun-filled birthday party at Tenney Park beach. He'd enjoyed his fourth birthday party so much, that he requested a repeat. So we had a Godzilla cake (constructed and decorated by Granny and Andrew), a T. Rex pinata (in lieu of Godzilla), swimming, relaxing beach fun with family, and this year...an entertainer who made cool balloon sculptures for the kids.

I didn't take many photos, but Jessica took some for me. And Granny took some too. Enjoy a few! More are available in the gallery!

























**Incredible light (2010-06-25 07:55)**

When Bryan's parents were here last weekend, we were enjoying a quiet, post-kids-bedtime moment in the sunroom when we noticed that the sky had turned an unbelievable shade of tangerine. It really looked bright orange. We've had a lot of storms passing through the area over the last several weeks (one of the reasons why Sylvia now covers her ears and cries about thunder when she is put in her crib), but this orange sky evening was amazing.

I ran outside with my camera to take a few pictures.

First the birch tree in a neighbor's yard that was lit up so amazingly.



Then my view of the sky from our driveway.



Then our house...bathed in orange light.





Oh, and my flowers. Look how soft and pretty they look!





On a different night in a different state, Bryan's mom took this lovely photo. I just love light!





### **Granny and Grandad's visit (2010-06-26 07:04)**

Bryan's parents were here in from June 16-20, and we had such a nice visit. I didn't have my camera out very much, but thanks to Granny, we did get some pictures. Enjoy!

Getting Grandad at the airport. Sylvia and Andrew raced to see him and jumped and yelled excitedly while he came down the escalator. Such a fun welcome!



We had lots of fun meals together.



Granny took Sylvia shopping to get her flip flops and sunglasses...items that my girl has been very much desiring. While shoe shopping at Target, Sylvia found that she couldn't try on the shoes fast enough.



She had fun trying on so many, but it was all a little overwhelming for her. We ended up with some cute pink flip flops and purple sunglasses, and we managed to avoid purchasing a satin zebra striped purse that she set her eye upon.



### **Sprinkler performances (2010-06-27 07:15)**

Sprinklers are such a wonderful summertime toy! For his birthday, Bryan's parents got a fun water sprinkler with crazy, wiggly heads. Andrew had such fun playing in it, and for a couple days, he amazed us with his sprinkler performances. Some included props like Frisbees. He wanted to be rated after his sprinkler runs, and after a while, he surpassed a 10. Then 12. When he got up to 15, we started writing press releases. Granny and Grandad wrote up three news stories about Andrew's amazing feats. He broke the world record first with a "15" then a "16" and finally...wait for it...a "17"!











Here's Granny writing and illustrating the first article.



Of course, Miss Sylvia was participating too. However, she didn't really want to get wet from the sprinkler, so she would run cautiously toward it, and then...



...wwwweeeehaaawww! Come a-running right back to much applause.



More news-story writing. The articles are all now displayed on Andrew's bedroom door.





Thanks, Granny and Grandad for being so fun and for making Andrew and Sylvia so very happy!

### **Andrew's (actual) birthday (2010-06-28 07:07)**

Around here, it seems that birthdays stretch for days if not weeks. And that's fine with me, because I like parties! Especially with family:)

So here are some images from Tuesday, June 22. More are available in the gallery.

We were hanging out at home, when the doorbell rang, and what should be there but a cookie bouquet from Andrew's Great-Grandma Jo. He and Sylvia devoured them all.



That evening, brimming high on the cookie sugar, we went to Pedro's, where Andrew was excited to get a "pink drink" (non-alcoholic strawberry Margarita) and a cake just like Bubba and Joe did for their birthdays last March. For supper, Andrew licked the cheese off his cheeseburger. And that's it. No bun, no burger. Just the cheese. Birthday fun!!

Here's a few pics from dinner. More are in the gallery.

There's the birthday boy.





They gave him a sombrero...so cute!



It's always fun to get together for a meal.





Terry's Aunt Rusty (left) and Terry's mommy: Topsy (right) are both visiting Madison this week. Such lovely ladies inside and out.



Blowing out his birthday cake.



I think he's loving his role as the birthday boy!



So now he's Five for real. And ever more:)

### **97 years old (2010-06-30 07:33)**

Terry's Uncle Donny was 97 years old when he died. Talk about longevity! Donny was a bachelor and had lived in California most of his life. He and his three brothers (including Terry's dad Forry) grew up in Red Wing, Minnesota.

Donny's funeral was last Wednesday. I drove up and met up with Terry, Terry's mom Topsy (from Salem, Oregon), his brother Mike (also from Salem), his Aunt Rusty (from LA and more recently Minnesota), and his Uncle Spin (from Red Wing). I just love Terry's family. They're like my own:) But as a special treat, my very own sister was there too.

I hadn't seen Uncle Spin in years, and it was so nice to see him again. He is just a charming, loving person, and it's hard not to smile when you're near him.



While I grew up seeing Uncle Spin pretty regularly, I'd only met Uncle Donny a couple times. Once when I was 7 on a family trip to California and once in 2001 when Terry and I took a trip to L.A. Here's a couple pictures of Uncle Don from that trip. He had a lemon tree growing in his yard. That kind of blows my mind. And his jade plants were huge bushes in his yard. So this is a younger me with Uncle Donny.



And here's Terry and Uncle Donny.



Uncle Donny's obituary can be read [here](#).

We all met at the St. James Hotel in Red Wing for lunch. I had the wild rice soup and it was so seriously yummy that I almost asked for the recipe. Then I got home and found it online! Not-so-secret ingredients: heavy cream and whole milk.

Here's a few photos I took at lunch.

Lovely Topsy:





I got to see my beautiful sister!!



Terry's brother Mike:





Uncle Spin has been going blind due to macular degeneration for quite a few years. Here he has just put on Uncle Donny's WWII ring. It has to be an odd thing to be the last sibling. Donny was the oldest Haller boy and Spin (whose real name is Dean) is the youngest.



There was a color guard, and Uncle Donny was buried with military honors.



The moments after a funeral aren't always the most appropriate for taking photos, but the light was just lovely. Here's Terry and Maretta.



And Aunt Rusty.



And Terry and his brother Mike.





Topsy and Aunt Rusty



We found Terry's grandmother's grave.



And then found Uncle Blue's (a.k.a. Lyndon's) grave. Uncle Blue was Aunt Rusty's husband.



So after that brief visit, I turned around and returned home. How nice it was to see them all.





## 6.7 July

### Birthday shoes (2010-07-01 00:54)

My husband is the best. Check out the reason my toes are so very happy today.





### **Back from DC (2010-07-06 00:03)**

We're back home after spending the last five days enjoying time with friends in Maryland (next to Washington DC).

Last week...the week of my 33rd birthday...was wonderful - and soooo busy! I had somewhere between five and eight items on my calendar on MTW, and then on Thursday, we flew out of Milwaukee. Thank goodness we didn't leave early in the morning, because I was doing laundry and pulling bags out of the basement before swimming lessons and then our flight. This week should be more chill, with the calendar touting two-to-four activities a day. Nice to have some structure but not to be running around too crazy. Always looking for a balance.

We flew to DC on Thursday on a really bumpy flight. Sylvia was playing in her seat, and Andrew was reading a big stack of books to himself until, without warning, Andrew vomited all over his books, himself, and (you guess it) me. Andrew has never before thrown up, so this was a little starting to him. He couldn't figure out what was all over him and why he had some "chewy stuff" in his mouth. Then he got weepy because his armadillo shirt was dirty. A nice book and two magazines were later sent to the trash. Andrew and I got ourselves (sort of) cleaned up, and I talked with him about the feelings he may have been experiencing in his tummy and that in the future if he experiences those feelings that he should request a bag. Now I've been puked on by both my kids (if you missed Sylvia's 2009 barfing story with the cocktail napkin, you can catch it here).

Really, though, that incident was pretty minor. It's just the type of thing I feel compelled to write about because it was dramatic and disgusting. Somehow dramatic, disgusting events are more obvious material for writing about than hours spent talking and laughing with good friends on the deck.

And that, dear readers, is what we did a lot of on this trip...talking and laughing with Grace and Tim while Andrew, John, and Sylvia played about. Or I lounged about while Bryan and Tim played street hockey with the boys. Or ate food and lingered at the table while the kids begged us to get up and play with them.

But all that's to come in the next post. For now, I'll leave you with a scene of two very happy boys on a summer afternoon.



#### **4th of July parade (2010-07-07 07:42)**

While we were in the DC area, we attended a great 4th of July parade in Takoma Park, Maryland. We missed the Monona Memorial Day parade this year because we were in Maine, so Andrew was particularly excited to eat the

candy see the parade with our friends.



Grace has a friend whose parents have a home right on the parade route. They invited Grace to come and bring her friends. So she brought 10 of us: her family, our family, my brother Joe, and Heather, Michael, and Evelyn. The parade was really well stocked with politicians and performers and community groups of all sorts.



We all enjoyed spending the morning on a shady neighborhood street and watching them march by.









The color guard started it off.



And then there were oodles of local, county, state, and federal politicians in neat cars.



A lady in stilts protesting the hot topic of the parade: the elementary school was going to switch to Styrofoam plates, and most everyone was carrying signs demanding the return of a dishwasher.



Bag pipers. Uncle Joe wants to learn how to play the bagpipe.



Good buds.



Evelyn in the flag-waving spirit.





John considers eating his lollipop.



The Learners on the 4th.



Evelyn is just so stinkin' cute I could eat her with a spoon.



Michael helps Sylvia with large chunks of watermelon.





Two girls are pooped out and manage to be sharing a common space without arguing.



My Sylv taking a rest with Poodle and Paci.



Hope your 4th of July was a great one! I'm so glad to be an American.

**John and Andrew over the years (2010-07-08 07:56)**

We always so enjoy our annual vacations with Grace, Tim, and John. As I pull together photos from this trip, I've been thinking back fondly on our visits over the years.

In 2005, we went to DC for John's baptism in October (photos here). The boys were six and four months old. Such tiny things they were!



In 2006, the Ernst Manubay crew came to Madison for the start of our 4th of July weekend visits (see photos). John was adorable...just testing out running at 15 months, and Andrew was a chubby, crawling, curly-topped babe at 12 months.



In 2007, we traveled to DC with Andrew (who was a newly minted Two), and John who was Two-and-a quarter (see photos). We told them we were pregnant with Sylvia during a visit to the National Zoo. Here the boys are playing in their froggy boots at Sligo Creek.



In 2008, Grace came to help me out soon after Sylvia was born (we cleaned out my closets!), and then we traveled to DC over Labor Day to visit and to go to Kacy and Reutiger's wedding. Much Slip 'n Sliding fun was had (see photos).





In 2009, we met again in Madison (see photos). In honor of the previous year's water fun, we spent lots of time in the sprinkler. It's so nice to see these boys enjoy each other so much even though their visits are so far apart!



So here we are in 2010 (see photos)! These boys didn't need much warm-up time at all this year. Andrew slept in the trundle bed next to John's bed, and the two of them stayed up waaay too late each night talking and giggling. This year's visit was punctuated by sports: street hockey, soccer ball kicking, and indoor goal scoring. John loves games with balls as much as Andrew loves animals. It was neat to see that John's passion was contagious. Andrew caught the bug:)



Thanks, Grace and Tim, for having such a great son! We're looking forward to many more years together.

#### **Street hockey, reading aloud, and art time (2010-07-09 07:08)**

Grace and Tim...thank you for a wonderful visit! We spent a lot of time just hanging out. The boys played street hockey...much to Bryan's delight... We went to Sylvia's first play: If You Give a Pig a Pancake. We walked to Great Falls in Maryland. We spent a lovely evening at Heather and Michael and Evelyn's house and got to see their new home and the place Joe will be staying for the next couple months. We watched the fireworks on television. And we read and cooked and ate and played.

Here are some photos of our visit. I only wish I'd ventured outside to take some photos of the boys as they exuberantly played street hockey. What fun!

















## 6.8 August

**is anyone still out there?** (2010-08-24 11:33)

A shy voice in the ether.

"hello?..."

Friends? Family? Curious acquaintances?

I've left you for oh, so long. My last post was a month and a half ago. And you know the weirdest part (for me)? I haven't even spent much time thinking about this electronic journal into which I have poured so much of myself these past five years. Truth be told, I haven't spent much time thinking at all. Instead, I've been enjoying the summer and - drumroll please - I've been working out. Apparently my brain and body and soul have room for one or



two obsessions (this blog being one of them) but not three or four. So I've put all my energy into getting up at 5am to go to my boot camp work out and then dragging my sorry body through the rest of the day...writing down everything I eat...before I collapse at 8:52pm. I've had fun with some photo sessions these last weeks, and our family has spent lots of time outdoors (much of which was spent donating blood to the local mosquito mafia that have taken over Madison this summer). But I haven't even been composing blog posts in my mind much less typing them out.

I just logged on to my blog and had to update the software, and I almost forgot my password. Crazy crazy.

I've got lots of things to share from our July and August, and we have exciting things on the horizon (Andrew's first day of school is on Sept. 1!), but to start out, I thought I'd write to say hi and come on back. Thanks for the emails and calls I've gotten from friends either concerned for my non-posting welfare or friends who've let me know that their days are better with a little dose of this blog.

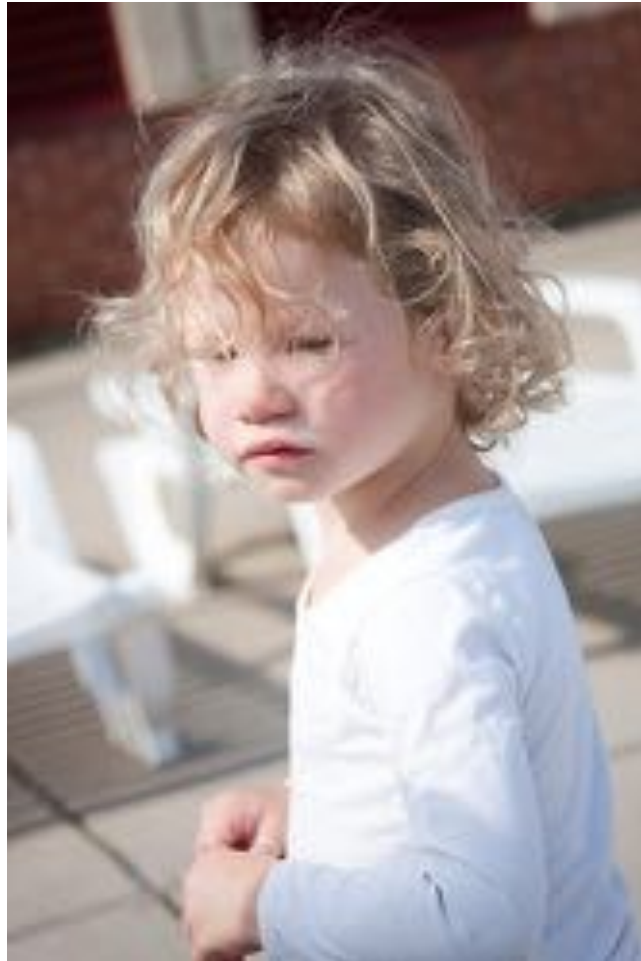
Love ya all!

Peace,  
Althea



### Police whistle in an enclosed space (2010-08-25 07:33)

Not to dive right back in on a complaining note, but, well, sometimes real life involves some ear-piercing moments. And some days include many, many, many of those moments. Today was one of those days. For Sylvia. And me. And me and Sylvia. My darling daughter, who is in large part a complete joy and delight, is also sometimes such a challenging little person for me. In the last month she has stopped napping during the day. That change has resulted in smooth, happy bedtimes, but it has also meant that my dear girl gets very tired off and on throughout the day. And a tired Sylvia is a girl who has decreased ability to regulate her mood. Which can be a frightening thing to contemplate.



When Sylvia is well fed and well rested, she can take life's bumps and turns with great aplomb. But. but.but.but. When she's hungry or tired, sometimes the world just seriously needs to watch out or get out of the way. Steer Clear.

She gets notably sleepy in the early afternoon (when she used to nap), but I've found that on some days, she also has a really hard time throughout the morning. And for Sylv, a hard time means a lot of shrieking and throwing of things. It means she's playing a lovely game or riding her trike and then <poof> she erupts and all that's left is smoke and bits of sizzling ash. This morning, her screams echoed through the house off and on for hours.

Andrew spent the morning at a nature camp, and while we were going to pick him up, Sylvie threw an all-out, 10-alarm fire tantrum. Her shriek was like a police whistle, blowing first staccato and then a sustained note complete

with a whistle-like tremolo. Although we had the windows closed, pedestrians walking on the street looked up with alarm as we drove by.

On the way to get Andrew (maybe a 10 minute drive), I was calm and tired and rather fed-up, so I tried a different tactic - mockery.

Me: "Oh, that's only mediocre screaming," I noted. "I've heard much louder."

Sylvia: <shriek>

Me: "You know, that one was alright, but really, I expect more."

Sylvia: <sustained scream>

Me: "Your Aunt Maretta can scream much better than that."

Sylvia: <clearly surprised by this one.> She pulls herself out of her hysteria, and asks, "Uncle Kyle scream too?"

I'm not proud of mocking my daughter in her time of great sadness and fury, but it was all I had in me at the moment.

Unfortunately, after picking up Andrew from his camp, she started tantrum-ing again when we got back in the car. I told her it wasn't acceptable and that I would have to give her a spanking if she kept doing it. I gave her the count of three, and she screamed at me after each count. So I took her out of the car and gave her bare bottom a couple swats. I've done that a couple times in the past. I'm not sure where I fall on the spanking issue. I never really really spanked Andrew, but with Sylvie I am sometimes just at a loss for how to get through to her and to make her boundaries clear. The drive home again wasn't fun. Post-spanking, Sylvie upped the ante on her screaming. I watched in the rear-view mirror as Andrew's face got redder and redder, his hands pressed tightly over his ears. Then he was openly weeping saying, "Pllleeeaaasee, Sylvia. STOP!!"

I passed a scooter whose driver wasn't wearing a helmet, and my thought was that minivan drivers should wear big hard-sided helmets because maybe then my head would not crack open like an overripe watermelon due to the screaming of a two-year-old.

Ahhh, yes. FORTUNATELY, upon returning home, we all made up, and then Tom came over to watch Sylvie while I took Andrew for his 5-year-old doctor's appointment. And Sylvie was a total peach for Tom. And after getting home from the doctor's the rest of our day went just fine. In fact, the spanking seemed to have a good effect in that Sylvie brought it up a couple times and remembered how after the spanking we hugged and said that we love each other and she remembered that it happened because she was yelling in the car. So maybe things will go better in the future.

Maybe, maybe these recent days of increased intensity will mellow a little as she gets used to not napping or as she gets closer to Three (in February). Or maybe not. In any case, when this little girl of mine is in a good mood, she is such fun to be with. I just love her to pieces no matter the mood. She's an energetic little spite, my girl!

## Looking back at July (2010-08-26 07:16)

Oh my dear friends, so many things have happened, so many photos have been taken. July. July? I don't honestly actually remember July. Let's look back at the photos (mostly taken on my phone) to see what we did that long summer month. Let's see, my last post was on July 9. The next day I started exercising. And my blog writing ceased.

We took the kids to the Dane County Fair. It's always so fun to see all the animals and get a cream puff. Sylvia loved feeding the goats.



And for a special treat this year, the kids got to do a pony ride! Here's Andrew (with his face all self-painted) looking at his pony with some skepticism.



Sylvia was really excited (and a little worried). She wanted me to stand right next to her. But as soon as her pony (Blue) started to walk, she tipped back her head and laughed with delight. I have not-so-secret hopes that my girl will come to love horses so we can ride together:)



Here the kids are eating a cream puff. Or rather using their fingers to scrape all the cream off the puff. It's nice that one cream puff can feed a family of four!





Here are my fierce and adorable children.





Andrew asked me for several weeks to give him a short haircut like his daddy. So finally I gave in and agreed to lop off some of his beautiful curls.



Here's the curly carnage. Fortunately his hair is cute short or long (so says his mom), and it grows back!



Here's a note Andrew gave me asking (I guess it's pretty self-explanatory) to have a sleep-over with Alivia.



In late July, Andrew headed to Texas for a nine-day visit. Granny flew up for a quick visit, and then she flew back home with her very-excited grandson.



I don't think it is possible for Andrew to be more happy and content than he is when he gets to spend time with his relatives. He absolutely relishes his visits to Texas, and I think I talked to him once or twice the whole time he was gone. From all reports, it was a great vacation. For me too! One kid is much easier than two!

### **Wedding in the UP, eh (2010-08-27 07:01)**

While Andrew was in Texas, Michael and Lisa bravely took Sylvia for the weekend while Bryan and I drove up to the Upper Peninsula for a wedding. One of Bryan's past co-workers and good friend was getting married at a beautiful site on Lake Michigan. I'm so glad we were able to get away to attend!

Here's me and my handsome sweetie before the wedding.



I neglected to bring my camera ("How did this happen!?" you ask? "How could you let this happen????"). So the only pictures I got are taken with my phone. And for some reason, I took no (zip, zero, zilch) of the bride and groom. I think Bryan was enjoying being with me at a wedding where I wasn't zipping away every few moments to get a few more pictures:)

So here, compliments of my phone, is Bryan at the beach at sunset.





And here are the bride's shoes. She made her dress herself. The wedding was held on the beach, and the clouds sprinkled rain down on the personalized umbrellas off and on. Family members made lovely toasts and one friend recited pi as far as he could. A young boy said that when he heard that Adam was a scientist, he thought that he must be a mad scientist. It was great!



Cupcakes were so lovely and were made by a friend of the bride's.



Here's the bride's pretty wildflower bouquet.



Such a beautiful sunset! Such bring and brilliant stars!



The bride and groom met at the Burning Man festival. And because they are quirky, independent thinkers, they decided to create a bride and groom (modeled on themselves) whom they burned in effigy at the end of the reception.





There they go...up in smoke and lots and lots of fireworks. What a great party! And how fun to get away for a couple days with my husband! Thanks to Michael and Lisa for taking the kiddo!



### **Sylvie and Mom road trip to MN (2010-08-28 07:09)**

After Bryan and I got back from the wedding in Michigan, Sylvia and I packed our bags and drove up to St. Paul to see Maretta and Kyle. Maretta was in a play (*The King's Ward*), and she wasn't going to be able to make it to Jack's house for our annual get-together, so Sylvia and I decided to head up north to see them.

Here's Maretta and Sylvia (check out the pose she's striking!) standing in front of Maretta's home. Maretta, Kyle, and two friends live on the second story of this beautiful home. In this beautiful neighborhood. In this lovely city. It all just makes me smile.



Here's a photo of us out together for dinner. Sylvie was enjoying herself quite a bit:) The weather had been up past 100 degrees, but while we were eating dinner, a front blew through, and it was a coolish walk home.





Maretta took us to Como park where we rode on the carousel before going to the zoo. Sylvia was excited but as you can tell from the death-grip she has on Maretta's neck, she was a little nervous too.



We went to Kowalski's grocery store and bought ourselves an extravagant picnic lunch. They had a display of

summer clogs for 50 % off. As you can tell from Sylvia's footwear, I had to indulge. So cute!!!



I've been thinking about getting Sylvia a doll carrier for some time, and when I found this kid-sized Ergo at Peapods, I got too excited.



Here's my beautiful, delightful girl.



We wandered around Minihaha Park. It was a lovely park with lots of water. Sylvia had fun splashing around! (photo by Maretta)



I'll leave you with a view of my girl's toes. Maretta (who took this picture) likes bare tootsies as much as I  
1454



do:)



It was so nice to spend a full day with my sister. I really enjoyed seeing Maretta and Kyle's apartment, visiting with their kitties, seeing their roommates, and - the icing on the cake - watching Maretta give a great performance on stage. Thanks for a really lovely visit, guys! Maretta, one of these years you'll have to make it back to Jack's!

### **1,000 Posts! (2010-08-29 07:14)**

Big news here at DotzourFamily.com today. Since I started this blog in May of 2005, I have shared the highs and lows of our family's life. And here, today, I am posting the 1,000th post. That's a big number! If I had advertisers/if this blog brought in any money, this would be the time to give away fabulous prizes. But I have no income, and there are no fabulous prizes. Hooray!

So instead, I'll thank you for commenting. In addition to the 1,000 posts, my dashboard tells me that I have received over 1,500 comments. And each one of those comments makes me happy.

Being a parent, I have often felt adrift at what to do next <or> amazed and wanting to share my miraculous

kids. While Mom was struggling and not struggling and then struggling with cancer, this blog was a great tool for sharing and connecting and feeling supported.

I wonder what 1,000 will grow to? Stay tuned.



### **Andrew returns home (2010-08-30 07:35)**

After his 9-day visit to Texas, Andrew returned home late on a Thursday night. Here's my boy running happily toward me at the airport. What a happy feeling to see him again!





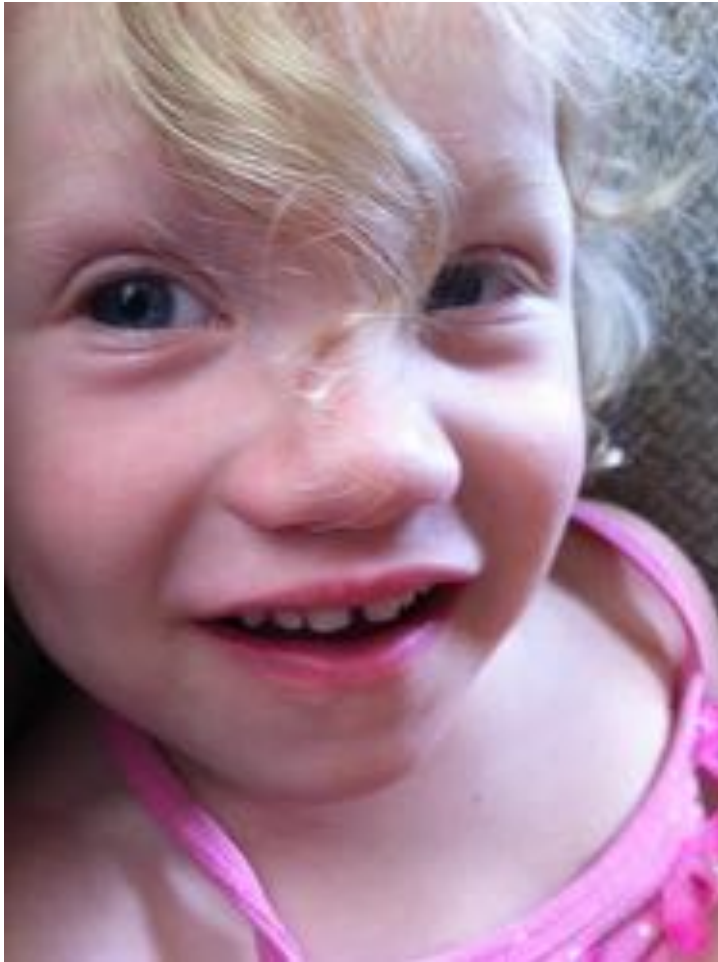
Here's Andrew and Aunt Mel at the airport. We were really excited to have Melanie able to visit us for a long weekend!



The next morning, Andrew was soooo happy to see Sylvia. And Sylvia was so happy to see Andrew. Here's a photo (snapped off my phone) of their happy reunion.



And a couple other random images. Here's Sylvie. A little girl with a a little curl right in the middle of her forehead.



We moved their car seats to the back of the minivan. So exciting! They can touch each other while driving!



Andrew and Melanie flew in on Thursday night (Sylvia and I got back from St. Paul earlier that day), and on Friday morning, we packed up and drove out to Jack's house for our semi-annual pilgrimage. This time, we were excited to bring Melanie!

**August 31 (2010-08-31 13:41)**

It's a kinda big day in my world today. For example:

- Andrew starts Kindergarten tomorrow
- Three years ago today my mom died. After watching and helping her for three weeks, this was the the first day she was gone. And while this day and this time of year feels a lot less bad than it did one or two years ago, there's still a gaping void in my life where my mom should be. For me, time does heal, but the reality of her absence still just pretty much sucks.
- This morning we took Andrew in to the UW Children's Hospital for a consult about Andrew's belly button. He's had a herniated umbilicus since he was born, and at his 5-year appointment last week, his doctor suggested that we talk to a surgeon. Sounds like herniated belly buttons heal themselves in about 70 % of cases, but if

it hasn't healed by the time a child is 4 or 5, it probably won't heal. I'd planned to hold-off on surgery until Andrew was 10 or 15 or so (there's no big hurry), but the doctors indicated that young kids often recover faster and worry less. So we decided to go ahead and do it now. His surgery is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 22. It's a pretty minor surgery, but I kinda feel like throwing up nonetheless. It's a bit of a mind-numbing experience to explain to your skipping happy-go-lucky son what a surgery is...first in general terms and then as the questions become increasingly specific in more challenging terms (knife?? cut???? whimper).

- Sylvia has had a rough time these last days. There's been multiple humongous public tantrums. Fortunately, when she's not exploding, she's delightful.

Yup, that pretty much sums up the emotions puttering around in my gut today.

We're off to attempt a school supply shopping trip. Then Tom is watching the kids this afternoon for a few hours. Sweet relief!

Here's a photo for you. Andrew got to meet his teacher - Maestra Laura - yesterday afternoon. She seems like she'll be a lot of fun, and I think my guy is going to love his new school.

Hugs,

Althea





## 6.9 September

### Andrew's first day of Kindergarten - Part I (2010-09-01 10:27)

This morning, Bryan and I walked our now-five-year-old baby boy to his first day of Kindergarten. He's been sooooo excited! When Andrew is happily anticipating something, he gambols about like a long-legged foal. There's been a lot of gamboling at 4310 Hegg Ave. recently:)

Last night, after I tucked him in bed, he came out to the living room and curled up next to me. "I'm so excited!!" he declared. "I can't wait until tomorrow!" Around 9:15, I was reading in bed, and he climbed in bed with me, confessing that he couldn't sleep because his body wouldn't settle down. "I can't take deep breaths to quiet my body," he said. "But snuggling here in bed with you helps." Soon after, he went back to his own bed and found his way into the land of dreams.

Sylvia is at daycare at Donna's house on Wednesdays, so this morning, Andrew got me and Bryan all to himself. Alivia came to the door to pick us up, and after taking a few first-day-of-Kindergarten pictures, we headed out.

Here's a slide show of pictures from our morning.

[EMBED] And here are some of my favorites. Andrew's first day of Kindergarten!



Andrew with his buddy Alivia. She's starting first grade at Nuestro Mundo this year!



Walking off to school.



Oh, so cute!



Gotta love Miss Alivia's red, red shoes. Oh, how much they've grown!



There's my handsome husband helping walk his little guy to school for the first time.



We're here!





Andrew's looking for his classroom.

1468





Taking it all in...



Here are a couple of the tables where the kids will sit.



Here's where the kids sit and plan out their day.



There's the calendar and class chart.



After taking a peek at the classroom, we headed out to the playground where the teachers were gathering up their students. Here's Maestra Laura with a few of her students.



What a bustling, slightly chaotic, exciting environment!





While the class assembled, Andrew talked to some of his new classmates (including one who was feeling pretty sad), waved and grinned, and generally looked pretty happy and confident. Here's a few faces he gave me just before heading inside.









Toodles kiddos!



Here's some of the happy and proud parents photographing their kid's departure.



And here is the sign on the door. Have fun, Andrew!!!



I'll try to do a follow-up post this afternoon to report on how the day went!

## First day of Kindergarten - Part II (2010-09-01 15:11)

I picked up Andrew at 1:45 from his first day of Kindergarten. They have short days today and tomorrow. He came out of school full of smiles. My young guy doesn't tend to be too forthcoming with details about his life, but he did tell me that he made a friend (although he wasn't sure what his name was:) We held hands while we walked home, and then Andrew and Alivia conspired to play together post-school today. So in the last hour, I haven't seen much of him. Perhaps we'll learn a little more during quieter moments tonight.

Here are a few images from the end of his first day.

Here's the scene outside the school, awaiting his dismissal.



So many cute kids!





I shot this one from the hip. So nice to see his sweet face running to greet me!



It's official! He's a full Kindergartener!



(Reluctantly) posting with Alivia before heading home.



This photo puts a lump in my throat. My little guy holding my hand.



He's feeling good!





And the backpack is dumped by the door... So it begins!



**Early August outings (2010-09-02 07:26)**

Back in August, I biked the kids to the downtown Farmer's market. Here's Sylvia embracing life (and the impatiens):



It all went great until my girl didn't want to put on her seatbelt for the bike back home. Thus began a half-hour tantrum. Here I am photographing the start of it. Somehow, she calmed down and was convinced to ride nicely. Patience paid off!



Bryan's parents came to town for a quick visit on their way to the PGA tour in Kenosha, Wisconsin. We really enjoyed seeing them. Here Sylvia is sitting on Grandad's lap at Red Robin.



We had a lot of big storms this summer. Here we're driving with Terry and his cousin's daughter, Brittany, in Columbia County just northwest of Madison. The storm clouds were just amazing. And we drove through some major downpours. The kids loved driving through the flash floods that filled the roads!



Another morning at the farmer's market. Sylvia has worn a swimming suit about 85 % of the time this summer. Here she is (again) sporting the Kitty Cat suit, backwards.





We stopped to run around and to sample our purchases. Andrew's cheeks are filled with delicious sungold tomatoes.



Sylvia is (finally!) wearing the adorable dress that Granny made for her!



Such a cute kid she is!



Ahh summer...you're fading into a warm, happy, active, delicious memory. I'm so glad to have been home with the kids to enjoy it so thoroughly!

### **Jack's summer float weekend 2010 (2010-09-03 07:48)**

Due to the usual obsessive nature of my blogging, I sometimes wonder if things actually happen if I didn't write and post photos about them. Would Christmas really have been Christmas if there was no post on dotzourfamily.com? Did we ever all really go to Jack's house on a warm weekend in July/August? Or was that just a figment? Some passing fancy? Well, if you were feeling like maybe your memories were faulty, worry no longer! There was indeed a trip to Jack's house this summer, and I've got the blog post to prove it! The full album of pics is available in the gallery.

Here's our group (except for me) ready for our float down the river. From left to right, we have Terry, Jack, Josh (kneeling), Betsy, Kyle, Melanie, Michael (sitting), Lisa, Tom (kneeling), Joe, Andrew, Sylvia, and Bryan.





The Wisconsin River was so high this summer that it had gone well over its banks in many places. The photos below Bryan took of the kids swimming in what is normally a small grassy field next to the river. The slightly submerged vegetation is at the edge of the banks, and usually the river is 2-3 feet below the banks. This year, the grassy spot became a good splashing/swimming hole for the kids!









We enjoyed our dinners out on the patio. The bugs were out, but they weren't terribly hungry. What pretty sunset light.









Here's Jack's home as seen from the street at night. I just love knowing that the warm light coming from those windows is illuminating my family as we all enjoy a slow summer evening together.





Now a few people pictures. Here are the kids being themselves. Sylvie in our suitcase with paci.



And here's Andrew following in his mother and uncles' & aunt's footsteps, swinging himself around the pole.



Kyle is doing the dishes. We were so glad that he made the trip down even though Maretta wasn't able to come because of her (awesome) play.



Here's Sylvie acting a little cooky.



Andrew explores the world of reading books on Uncle Bubba's iPad.



Jack's prairie is stunning. Really amazing. It's come so far in the last 5 years! Here's a few images I took while swatting mosquitoes.











Jack's parents both passed away in the last couple years, and a group of friends commissioned this bench for his land. It's a really beautiful piece...and so fitting. There are also a variety of saplings planted in their memory.



Here's the view from the bench. We're looking down toward the Wisconsin River and the bluffs on the other side.



The river at sunset.



Melanie and Sylvia on the front steps of Jack's home. It was so fun to have Melanie come out to Jack's with us this year! Out trips to Jack's are such a happily anticipated aspect of my family's history. It was great to share it with her:)



Pretty balloon flowers.



Dad came out to join us on Saturday.





Flowers and a view of the river beyond.



Our nightly traditions include Trivial Pursuit and (new in the last five years) poker.





Jack took us in the pack of his pick-up for a tour of the prairie on Saturday night.



Here Dad is enjoying Jack's beautiful property.



Andrew and Sylvie loved getting to ride in the back of the pick-up truck. EXCITING!



My sisters!



Sunset between big bluestem and yellow coneflowers. Ahhh, summer!



## Sylvia's big-girl bed (2010-09-04 07:28)

Sylvia stopped napping sometime in July (sniff!!). And around the same time, she climbed (successfully) out of her crib a couple times. It is indeed a startling thing to have one's child appear before you when you think they are tucked away snug in their bed. So we decided that it was time to transition our girl from her crib to a big girl bed. The crib was Marett's (circa 1985). It's served us well for two babies, and it was a little sad to say goodbye.



Here's Sylvia's changing table. She's been potty trained since last spring, and I turned her changing table into a shrine of sorts for her favorite things: shoes and handbags.





Our babysitter Shara came over and watched the kids while I put together the new bed. Our friends Benson and Veronica gave it to us, and it's so cute in this little room! The stitchery above the bed was made by my mom. It's a sampler with a little girl taking a bunny rabbit for a walk. I'd asked Mom to make it, and I think she worked on it in 2004. I found it amongst Mom's things and had it framed last winter. So it's finally up in a place of honor in my little girl's room.

Note that Poodle and paci are perched on my girl's pillow. Poodle is no longer pink. It's now a kinda dingy brownish gray.





Here's Sylvia leaping in delight onto her new bed.



And there her brother joins her! How exciting!



Here she is asleep. Looks like she needs to get used to the absence of bars! She fell out quite a few times the first few weeks, but these days she's staying comfortably in the bed. And (thank heavens) she's done a good job of staying in her bed at night and in the morning. Yay for my big girl!



**Registering for school and getting back to the dentist (2010-09-05 07:30)**

On August 19, we registered Andrew for kindergarten. He was pretty stoked!



Here we are just outside his school taking a group shot before heading in.





My big guy requesting his folder of information for KG!



Registration was mostly me filling out forms and turning them in while the kids colored and watched a movie. But afterward, we wandered the halls to find his classroom. Here he is outside Maestra Laura Gibson's classroom, #104.



The next week, my big guy went to the dentist. Our insurance changed a year ago, and we never got around to finding new dentists. So after Bryan switched jobs in June, we made appointments. Andrew was soooo excited. Every day he would look at the calendar and say, "Three days until I get to go to the dentist!!!" Ahh, if only we all had the same enthusiasm and joie de vivre:)

Here he is in the dentist chair.



And here he's all ready for his cleaning.



Sylvia tries on the fancy dentist-patient sunglasses. She get's her first appointment in February!





Assorted pictures: Andrew and his stacking game ("Mom! Take a picture of me!")



And a hot air balloon that Sylvia and I spied while we were out running errands together the other night. She was so very intrigued by this sight!



### **Thinking back on swimming lessons (2010-09-06 07:32)**

Back when it was summer. When our lazy days were spent lallygagging from one activity to the next, Andrew and Sylvia took swimming lessons at the Monona pool. Each morning at 10am, we drove over to Jessica, Eli, and Celia's house and then walked together to the pool. Eli and Andrew had class in the morning, and the girls had class a couple afternoons a week. On the last day of class, I brought my camera to document some of the fun.

Here are our two five-year-old boys about to head to class. They're both so cute it makes my teeth hurt.



Guys being goofy in a less-well-lit part of the living room.



Since it was the last day of the session, the teachers got out all the noodles and toys, and the whole crew would jump in together to clean it up.



My Andrew is third from the right.



Here's where Jessica and I could be found five mornings a week. We often got a baby sitter for the girls so we could enjoy 40 minutes of leisurely pool-side chatting. Ahhh Next summer the girls will get to take their lessons at the same time as the boys!





Andrew's scooping up toys.



Eli is a ring-retriever extraordinaire.



I love how much these kids love being in the water!



As of this summer, Andrew's dunking and swimming under water. For a kid who spent the first four years of his life strenuously avoiding getting his ears/face/hair wet under any circumstances, this was a rather titanic shift! He loves it now!











There's Eli swimming about. He's getting to be such a great swimmer!



Andrew jumped off the diving board this last session. He told me how he was pretty nervous the first time, but then he just did it. And now, although there was a little hesitation, he seems to love it!







On the last day of class, they got the water slide going, and kids got the opportunity to slide down. It was so cute to see the crowd of life guards at the bottom waiting to catch "their kids." Andrew went down twice!







Here he is with his end-of-session certificate. In a way, I can't wait for next year when we can enjoy these hot pool days again!



### Andrew's Kindergarten Schedule (2010-09-07 07:58)

My little boy is off on his second week of Kindergarten. Hard to believe! He's really loving it.

Andrew's young heart thrives on calendars and schedules and charts. He starts each day looking at the calendar and figuring out what day it is and how many days until some event in the future. Now that we have the school's hot lunch schedule hanging on the refrigerator, we have a new topic to consider: hot or cold lunch today? [I could re-phrase that as processed, trans-fat-laden, sugar-filled hot lunch vs. organic, locally produced, nutrient-rich homemade lunch, but I won't. That's a topic for a different post.]

Andrew brought home some info on Friday describing the different classes that they have each day. I'd also received a handout describing the kindergarten class schedule. So Saturday morning, I took a few minutes and typed up a weekly schedule for my boy. So on any given morning he can look and see what special classes he has scheduled that day. And at any time of the day, I can glance at the schedule to see what he's up to.

### Andrew's Kindergarten Schedule - Neustro Mundo Community School

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-8:45	Begin the day (Sp)	Begin the day (Sp)	Begin the day (Sp)	Begin the day (Sp)	Begin the day (Sp)
8:45-10:00	Library (En) 	Literacy (Sp)	Literacy (Sp) 	9:05-9:35 P.E. (En) Literacy (Sp)	Literacy (Sp)
10:00-10:30	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10:30-11:00	Literacy (Sp)	Literacy (Sp)	Literacy (Sp)	Literacy (Sp) 	Literacy (Sp)
11:00-11:40	Lunch & recess 	Lunch & recess	Lunch & recess 	Lunch & recess	Lunch & recess
11:40-12:15	Rest or read	Rest or read	Rest or read	Rest or read	Rest or read
12:15-1:15		12:15-1:05 P.E.  12:05-1:15 Music	12:15-1:05 P.E. (En) 12:05-1:15 Music (En)	Computer (En) 	Art (En) 
1:15-2:00	Natural Science & Social Studies (En)	Natural Science & Social Studies (En)	Natural Science & Social Studies (En)	Natural Science & Social Studies (En)	Natural Science & Social Studies (En)
2:00-3:00	Math (Sp) 	Math (Sp)	Math (Sp) 	Math (Sp)	Math (Sp)
3:00-3:17	Dismissal (Sp)	Dismissal (Sp)	Dismissal (Sp)	Dismissal (Sp)	Dismissal (Sp)

(Sp) = Spanish  
(En) = English

Here's a version in PDF if you'd like a copy for yourself! This week he has four days of school, and next week, we'll be up to five. So far, so good:)

### Morning brain candy from NPR (2010-09-08 07:13)

Each weekday morning for the last month-and-a-half, I've been driving through the dark streets of Madison at 5:15am on my way to my morning fitness boot camp. There are many, many reasons that I've loved going to boot camp, but one of them is the time in the car listening to NPR. My kids, you see, are not fans of NPR. They do not like to have their ears assaulted with the sound of news or people who are not singing kids songs. So on a normal basis, I do not get to listen to NPR, which, my friends, makes me a little sad.

However, at 5:15am, I am the only one in the car, and I get to listen to my station for 15 minutes each way. That's 30 minutes!!! Oh the rapture:)

Sometimes, I even feel like I kinda know what's going on in the world these days.

One of my favorite segments is a special series called "The Human Edge." Each day they explore a different aspect of human evolution that gave us an evolutionary edge and allowed us to be as a species as dominant and "successful" as we have become. Shows have discussed our hands (allows us to hold and make tools), our feet (allows

us to stand upright, live on the ground, run), cooking our food, crying, and telling stories. Each segment is about 10 minutes long, and I've found each one to be really interesting.

You can read more (and listen online at) [NPR.org](http://NPR.org) or subscribe to the podcast on iTunes.



### **Humanism (2010-09-09 07:37)**

While reading a fellow-photographer's blog the other day, I learned about a school of thought called Humanism. She was saying that she wasn't religious but that her beliefs could most closely be summarized by the Humanist Manifesto. After reading it, I would kinda say the same thing about myself. I especially liked this sentence,

"We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death."

I generally loathe to define my views as those of a group. I won't (probably ever) commit to a political party because I staunchly think of myself as an independent. I like to think what I think and not subscribe to a group where there's a platform of ideas that one subscribes to. Also, as a disclaimer, I've done almost no reading on humanism, and I'm sure there are aspects of it that I wouldn't like. But in my reading of the "manifesto" below, I thought it was pretty nice. And without further ado, here it is:

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:



Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

## **Bootcamping mornings and running nights (2010-09-12 21:44)**

I just got back from a three-and-a-half mile run. I should put an exclamation point at the end of that statement since I can't remember the last time I ran that far. It's been pre-kids for sure:)

For the last nine weeks I've been attending Dustin Maher's 5:30am boot camps. And I loooove them. Which feels like a little bit of an odd thing to love. I think of myself as a person who loves good books. I love delicious food. I love to be outdoors. But working out? HARD? At 5:30am? That seems to be a little weird thing to love. Perhaps, then, I am a little odd, but I do indeed thrive on my early morning workouts.

It works really well for me to set my alarm and just get up and go without having to think or giving myself the opportunity to come up with excuses. Just get up, get dressed, and go. By the time I fully come-to, I'm at the park, visiting with my friends, and ready to follow the trainer's instructions. I've met some really great friends through Boot Camp. Several of us joined for a 21-day challenge back in mid-July, and my favorite part of going is getting to see them.

I like the way Dustin's workouts often leave me heaving and panting and sometimes nearly unable to drag my body back to the car. They also leave me happy and positive and empowered. When I get home at 6:30, I feel like I've accomplished something really substantial. I feel strong (or sore) and good in my body.

I've been going to Bootcamp 5-6 days a week. I'm also (mildly) training to run a couple 5Ks this fall (that's about 3 miles). As I've gone running in the evenings, I've been really happy with how easy it feels to run. It's clear that all the cardiovascular working out in the mornings is making running a much easier endeavor.

I've been mostly running 1.5 to 2.5 miles, but tonight I tried 3.5. Yay! The Vilas Zoo 5K run on Sept. 26 shouldn't be a problem:)

My whole schedule is going to change this week, though. My bootcamp membership ends on Wednesday (sniff!). As much as I enjoy it, I can't balance early morning workouts with my photography work in the evening. Going to bed at 9am isn't really compatible with running a business after the kids are in bed!

Fortunately, Dustin has an alternative fitness group - MamaTone. They meet in mid-morning, and I'm going to try it out. Childcare for Sylvia, a daytime workout for me...seems like it might make life a little more manageable!

I'll be sad to be leaving my park-based workouts when in wake up with the stars and watch the sun rise. But I'm glad to have found some fun and engaging ways to incorporate exercise into my life. I'll let you know how it goes!

## **Andrew's surgery is tomorrow (2010-09-21 14:33)**

x

My boy is having minor surgery on his herniated belly button tomorrow morning. I've tried not to think a lot about his operation recently. Writing out "minor" and "surgery" together seems a little oxymoronic when you're talking about a wee 5-year-old cub.

Andrew's surgeon is going to be Dr. Dennis Lund at the UW Children's Hospital. We're scheduled to check in at the hospital at 8:30 on Wednesday morning. His surgery is scheduled at 10:05am. I think they said that the surgery was scheduled to last around 45 minutes.

We've read lots of "...goes to the hospital books" include Curious George and Franklin. We've talked about the sleeping medicine that will help him go to sleep for the operation, and Andrew has expressed considerable relief that he won't have any shots or the IV put in until he is asleep. That said, he's nervous and brave.



Andrew's not supposed to eat solid foods after midnight, so I'm hoping that we can get up and out of the house tomorrow morning before he gets too worried about wanting breakfast. Sylvia will be at Donna's daycare all day on Wednesday, so that will leave Bryan and me free to focus on Andrew.

We get to be with our little guy in the operating room until he's asleep, and then we'll be with him again before he wakes up. I'm anticipating that post-operation nausea might be an issue, but hopefully they'll be able to help him with that.

The doctor said that he'll have a bandage over his belly button for something like a couple weeks. He'll be out of school on Thursday, and then we can see how he's feeling on Friday.

I'll plan to post tomorrow if the hospital has internet. Thanks for sending warm wishes our way.

And for those of you who are interested in the hospital we'll be at, the video below is a promotional piece from the UW Children's Hospital. The doctor narrating is Andrew's surgeon.

[EMBED]

### **Andrew's in surgery (2010-09-22 10:55)**

I'm writing to you from the lovely UW Children's Hospital. Andrew has been in surgery for the last 45 minutes, so I'm expecting to hear from his doctors at any moment. He's been doing great today!

Here are some photos and video (if it works!).

Here we are heading in at 8:30... The little guy has his backpack filled with card games, books, and one of his sweethearts.



Checking in...he's nervous but excited too.



Andrew got in several games of Xactica with me and Bryan between visits with nurses, surgeons, and anesthesiologists.





Here's Andrew with his nurse Lisa.



Here's a video of him playing patient in bed.

[EMBED] They gave him a sedative, and he got pretty dopey in the moments before surgery!



Here's a video of him getting sleepy (he wasn't really asleep at the end!) [EMBED] Here's the doctor getting ready to take him back.



And here's a video of him taking off with Bryan for the OR. [EMBED]

**Onto recovery (2010-09-22 12:53)**



Andrew is snuggled up to his dad on his hospital bed, watching *The Incredibles* on a portable DVD player after his umbilical hernia surgery. I've come to discover that a movie can have the power of a tranquilizer for a five-year-old.



Andrew got pretty agitated as he woke from surgery. He really wanted the IV out, the incision bandage removed, and to leave the hospital NOW. But he couldn't talk very clearly, so it was all just a lot of thrashing and unhappiness. ... Until his smart nurse suggested a movie. That and his daddy's strong arms and stabilizing presence calmed the boy down. When we left the recovery area, Bryan got to ride on the bed, all snuggled up with our little boy.

I've got to say, I am so impressed with how lovely this hospital is and how wonderfully they have their systems down. They are really set up to make things run smoothly for kids and their families.





After Andrew had stabilized a bit in recovery, we came back to our room, where Andrew and Bryan have continued to snuggle and watch their show. Andrew had his IV taken out a few minutes ago, and I think it's fair to say that that wasn't a good experience. Due perhaps to the extreme agitation he experienced during the IV removal, our boy threw up a few minutes ago. But I don't think he stopped watching the show.

We should be heading home before too long, armed with some Tylenol with codeine. Our little guy is pretty subdued, so I think we'll have a quiet afternoon.



**Back home, and the patient is doing well (2010-09-22 16:22)**

Andrew's in a much better emotional place than he was a few hours ago. We got home around 2:30. It helped so much that the nurse let him have the time he needed to snuggle with his dad and wake up more and finish his movie. He got dressed and got to ride a wheelchair down to the car. Nurse Lisa, you were great!

[EMBED]





Once we got back home, Andrew spent an hour or so in bed while we read him *Where the Sidewalk Ends*.

[EMBED]

Then, after eating some animal crackers and having a little Tylenol, he decided he wanted to come out to the kitchen for some more food (he hadn't eaten since the previous night). After munching a hardboiled egg, he walked himself back to his room. He was quite proud!



[EMBED]

After a normal doctor's visit, Andrew gets a sticker, and Nurse Lisa gave him 10 stickers as we left today.

Rapture!





### **Andrew's back at school (2010-09-24 15:00)**

I'm really glad that we elected to have Andrew's umbilical hernia surgery done when he was five. He's done so well, and he's bounced back so fast! By dinner time on Wednesday, he was hungry and eating and talking like normal. Our sweet neighbors brought by a stuffed frog for Andrew, and after dinner, he walked over to their house to thank them. Then (surprising me!), he went into the garage and got his tractor which he pedaled up and down the driveway.

On Thursday (that's yesterday), Andrew, Sylv, and I took it easy. We watched shows, played cards, read books, and stayed in jammies until the early afternoon. Andrew was subdued, somewhat cranky, and maybe at about 40 % of his normal exuberant self, but he was getting better and better. And despite feeling kinda crummy really, he hasn't seemed to be in any pain, which is great. (He looks sooo sad in this picture, though!)





After having sibling-relationships break down numerous times, I decided that we could all use some time out of the house. So we went to Door Creek Orchard and met up with Jessica, Eli, and Celia to pick some apples and to get some delicious cider.



The mosquitoes are still really intense at the orchard (soo glad I didn't schedule an orchard mini-session this month!). So we wandered through the trees for a little bit before beating a hasty retreat to the orchard barn where we gathered some pre-picked apples and a gallon of delicious cider. Both boys had attempted to climb the apple trees. Another indication that Mr. Andrew is feeling pretty agile.



I'm hoping that Andrew's winning smile makes more of an appearance as time passes. He woke up this morning feeling good, and he's been off at school all day...hopefully doing alright!

Sylvia and I have had a really nice day together. As much as she loves Andrew, she does so well when he's not around. She and I went to MamaTone to workout this morning (I worked out, she played!), and then we've just snuggled and laughed and watched shows together on this somewhat chilly fall day.

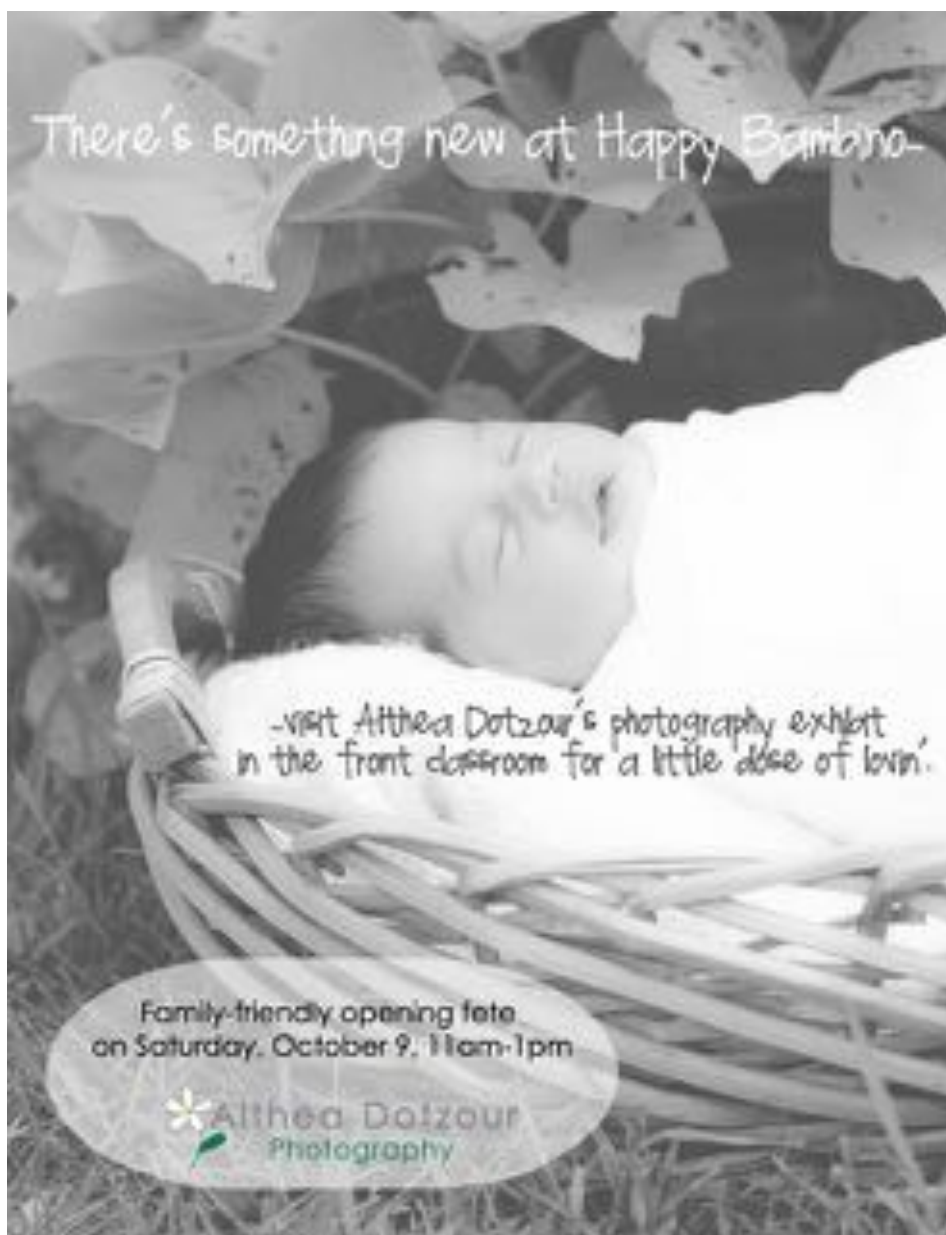
Almost time now to pick up my boy from school. I hope it went well!

### **Photo Gallery at Happy Bambino (2010-09-29 09:52)**

One of my very favorite stores in Madison is Happy Bambino. Part beautiful pregnancy and baby store, part parental resource center, Happy Bambino was a cornerstone of my early motherhood experience. When Andrew was a newborn, I attended a weekly mom's group at Happy Bambino; and it was in that cozy sunlit room, surrounded by a dozen other nursing mamas, that I got my parenting sea legs. I met mamas in that group who have become dear friends, and there's a group of about 12 of us who still keep in touch. How special it is to know a crew of now-five-year-olds and to remember so clearly what they were like as newborns. Early parenthood can be a scary and exhilarating time of charting unknown waters. I'm so thankful that Alison and Lea founded Happy Bambino and that it's available as a resource to Madison moms.

I'm excited to share that I have an exhibit of my photography hanging in the classroom at Happy Bambino this fall. It was so fun (and challenging!) to pick a dozen images to enlarge and frame and hang. If you're in town, stop by 4116 Monona Drive and head back to the green classroom to check it out!

I've scheduled a family-friendly opening fete on Saturday, October 9 from 11-1pm. There'll be food and games, so drop on by! Hope to see you then!



### Toddler playdate (2010-09-30 20:31)

A couple weeks ago, we met some friends at a park for a play date. Sylvia hadn't seen these girls in a few months, and it was so fun to watch them all playing. My how much they've grown! I grabbed Deb's camera and went to town taking pictures of the two-year-old cuteness.







We know these girls through Toddler Time at Monona Grove Nursery School, and it's really neat to see how much they've all grown over the last year. When she started Toddler Time last year, Sylvie was 19 months old...not talking much and still quite baby-like. Now she's much more like a preschooler, and it was so much fun to see the girls playing together!





















## 6.10 October

### Corn Maze! (2010-10-02 22:26)

What beautiful fall weather we've had these last few weeks! This weekend, Bryan is canoeing on the Kickapoo River with some friends. It's awfully chilly out tonight, and I'm really hoping that he's staying warm. For me at home, my laptop and cat are keeping me nice and toasty.

The kids and I had a nice day today. We bummed around the house all morning (nothing of any value was accomplished), and then we went downtown and had lunch with Terry. He just returned home from a month-long vacation to Kentucky. He drove something like 6,000 miles while he was gone, covering every stretch of road in the fine state...or very nearly close:)

After gorging ourselves at Flavor of India on Mifflin Street (probably our favorite place to eat!), the kids and I drove over to Bubba and Lisa's for a little visit. Lisa played with Sylvie, Andrew played with Michael's iPad, Michael mowed the lawn, and I took a nap. It was a nice break:) After a while, we all drove over to Middleton to check out a corn maze. I haven't wandered through a corn maze in many, many years, and it was a lot of fun! The weather was a bit chilly, and my dear, hot-blooded girl who was wearing a skirt, her cowgirl boots, a Halloween shirt and (adamantly) no jacket, was pretty chilly. Before beginning the maze, we had fun in the craft tent cutting and pasting and running around and around (the kids, that is). I painted Andrew and Sylvia's faces, and they had a lot of fun! Photos to follow.

Here are the kids diligently cutting and pasting...







Fall is here! The milkweeds are sending off their dancing seeds.



Happy, face-painted kids. They sure do love each other.



Here we are trying to answer some Halloween-related trivia. When he got an answer right, Andrew would leap about, proclaiming, "I'm a genius!"



There's my little Sylv. She's a delight, that girl!



Which way now??



It was Andrew's first corn maze. I think he had a great time!





The proceeds from this corn maze go to the Keep Wisconsin Warm/Cool Fund. It's located on the far west side in the Old Sauk Trails Park. I recommend it for an active fall outing!

### **September means apples (2010-10-04 07:41)**

I really, really, really thought I wrote a post about our apple orchard outings. But I guess that must have been on Facebook, because I see nothing that looks like an apple post here on my blog.

Well, friends, weather or not I am losing my mind, the truth remains that it is high apple season here in Wisconsin. Our favorite orchard is Door Creek Orchard, just to the east of Madison. We've been to the orchard several times, and while I've avoided making tempting baked goods from their bounty, we've had lots of apple sauce. And if the saying holds true, we shouldn't be seeing a doctor for quite some time.

Here are some pictures from a couple of our outings.



The mosquitoes have been incredibly bad this late summer, and unfortunately, they were still really thick at the orchard. We would venture in to pick and then run (sometimes screaming) into the safety of the apple barn.



Here's Jessica and Eli with some cider to take home.



Reading apple literature to the young ones.



One book: four kids





After purchasing our apples and cider, we trooped across the highway to the sheep pens.





These sheep are a perennial favorite of the kids. It's a lot of fun to feed them grass!



Then the farmer came over and let the kids throw rotten apples to the sheep. What fun!!



Hello, you happy Black Welsh Mountain Sheep!



There's our crew!



Back to the orchard!



Mmmm, does that cider taste goooooood!





Sylv gives it a thumb's up.





\* \* \*

Going back in time, here's some pics of our trip to the orchard a week earlier.



Bryan and his kids



Andrew contemplates his apple variety taste comparison. Or is he just two-fisting it?



My goodness, these kids can be hams. Where did Sylvie learn how to pose like that??



Goofy grapes one and two.





Sylvie gets a boost from Dad.





A happy day at the orchard.



Apple picking season is about half way through, but there's a good month to go. So if you haven't gone to your local orchard yet, I recommend it!

### **Pumpkin dominance (2010-10-05 07:08)**

This summer, our back yard was taken over by squash. Orange, globe-like gourds. Andrew brought home a pie pumpkin seedling from preschool last fall. Its growth (as of late August) is shown below.



This behemoth, on the other hand, is a jack-o-lantern variety that I brought home from the farmer's market in June. At the same time, I brought home a watermelon seedling and a zucchini seedling. We got nothing from the watermelon. The zucchini produced one respectable fruit. But the Pumpkin? the Pumpkin???



It took over the yard in three directions. While we blithely ignored it, the monster plant produced nine good-sized pumpkins.



Last week, Bryan harvested most of them. The first two were already decorating our front stoop.





We've given some away and still have several to share.



Now our yard is no longer a pumpkin patch. Andrew cannot wait until it's time to carve these bad boys. Our pie pumpkins are still producing, and I'm hoping to get a few more oranged up before the end of the season! Viva la pumpkin!

### **Zoo Run Run (2010-10-06 00:07)**

On September 26, I ran my first 5K race. I know it's old news by now, but bear with me:)

Three friends from Bootcamp and I met up on a beautiful September morning to run a 5K together. Julie and Natalie have been running 5Ks for a while, but this was my first race since high school. I was nervous! After going to bootcamp for a couple weeks, I've gotten pretty good at pushing my limits, and I was hoping to run a good race. Turns out, it was great! Such a fun morning...I can see myself getting a little addicted to doing runs like these!

Here's me and my girls after the race:





I don't know these girls, but I loved their costumes! I think I'm going to have to look for some tutus like this for the 5 mile Madison Mud Run I'm planning for Halloween!



And here are my race results. I can't remember what my speed was when I ran cross country in high school, but I think my pace in this race is at least as fast as it was then. Granted, I was the slowest one on the team, but even so, it's nice to know that I can crank it up:)



Henry Vilas Zoo Run Run - 2010  
5K Run  
September 26, 2010 in Madison, WI

### Althea Dotzour

<b>bib number:</b>	181
<b>age:</b>	33
<b>gender:</b>	F
<b>location:</b>	Madison, WI
<b>overall place:</b>	110 out of 604
<b>division place:</b>	7 out of 81
<b>gender place:</b>	31 out of 382
<b>time:</b>	25:47
<b>pace:</b>	8:18

After this race, I went out and bought myself some cold-weather running clothes to help motivate myself to keep running this fall and next spring. Inertia is a powerful thing. The inertia of the sofa has a keen draw, but I'd like to keep the pattern of once- or twice- daily exercise in my routine!

### Scenes from the last couple weeks (2010-10-07 07:24)

September was a beautiful month. Andrew's done well at school, Sylvia is loving having time just for her. Life's been good. Here are some pictures (all taken with my phone) that I've uploaded in the past couple weeks.

Here, we're heading down to Rayna's house to play. I love the way Sylvia runs...pumping her elbows with conviction!





These girls love their dress-up play. They have fun doing it for hours!





Miss Sylvie cracks me up with her Dorothy wig!



Another day, another costume!



Here's our home. The porch is covered in white clematis, and the pumpkins are out!



Spooky (left) and Bowser (right) love the fall. It makes them feel kinda crazy, which leads to occasional escape attempts and some early-morning races up and down the bed/hallway. I'm less of a fan of the spring and fall cat-insanity periods.



Sylvia started Toddler Time at Monona Grove Nursery School last week. Here she's greeting her teacher for the first time. She was soooo glad to be going back! She's told me that she wants to go to preschool "All by myself with no Mommy and no Daddy." Next year, kiddo! This year we're doing two mornings of Toddler Time, which is a parent-tot two-hour play time.



Here I'm using my new cutting board for the first time. Bryan and I got a bamboo cutting board for our wedding 11 years ago. Last week, it broke. So I bought a new one. It felt like a festive moment that should be captured for perpetuity.

[I'm making butternut squash soup if anyone's interested. mmmm]





Here, Andrew, Ranya, and a be-hatted Sylvia are playing on the front steps.



This tractor used to belong to my Uncle Kirk back when he was a kid. My cousins and I all played with it at my grandma's house. I picked it up from my grandma's storage unit a couple weeks ago. Andrew and Sylvia love it. I  
1606

should get some video of him pulling her in the wagon!



My kids are kooks!



Kooks who love to dress up!



Hope that all made you smile!

### **Olbrich flowers (2010-10-08 07:29)**

I'm having a lot of fun being home with Sylvia during the days. First, it's much easier with one child than two, and second, Sylv is just so much fun to spend time with...especially when our activities get to circulate around her!

Last week, we spent a little time at Olbrich Gardens. Sylvia was completely wrapped up in a make-believe dialogue while clambering over and under the giant hosta leaf sculpture. So I took the opportunity to play around with some foliage photography.

Before kids, I photographed my dog and cats. And before the furry ones, I photographed my plants. A lot. And I even featured them on my first website.

[Aside: if you go to that 2000/01 website, you'll note that all my plants were named. Yup, I named all my plants. Anita and Joyce are still with me. The others have perished. But that's OK. I kinda don't care about my plants anymore:] Also, is it odd that in reading my old website that I kinda crack myself up? I guess it's good that at least I find myself funny!]



These first two pictures are of the clematis vine that is growing up and over our front balcony. So pretty this time of year!

If you make your way alllll the way to the end of this photo extravaganza, you'll be treated with a few images of my silly daughter being a little over-the-top in a questionable outfit.

Oh, also, if you want to use any of these pretty flowers as your desktop background, you can download the high resolution version from Flickr. Directions are at the bottom.









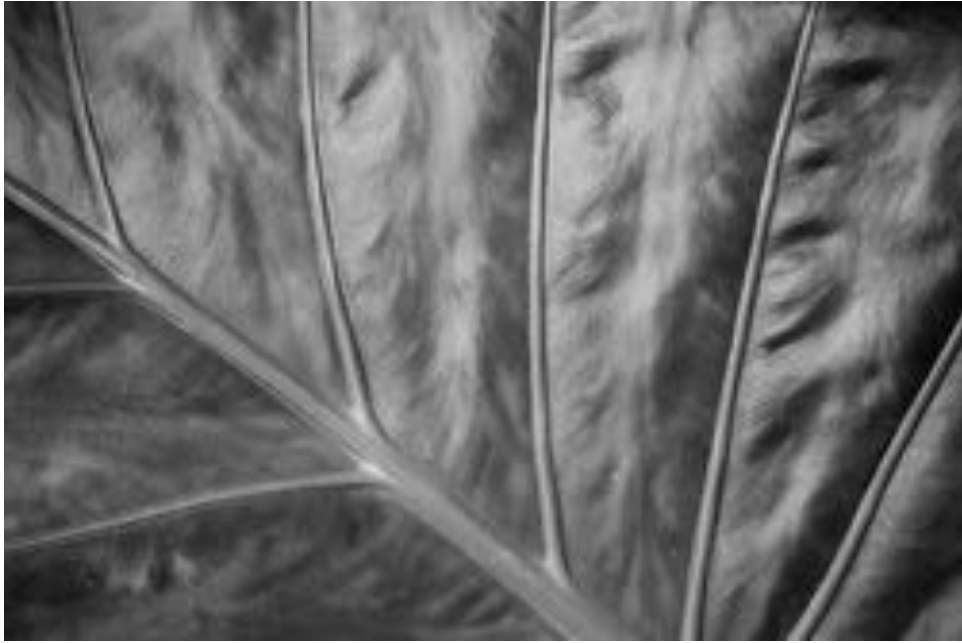






























Photo downloading instructions:

Click on the image you like, and you'll go to my website's photo page. Under the picture, there should be a link that says, "View this photo on Flickr" Click on that, and you'll be on the photo's page on Flickr. From there, click on the "Action" button just above the picture. One of the options should be "View all sizes." Click on either "Large" or "Original" (depending on the resolution of your monitor), and then download. Voila!

### **Continuity of conversation (2010-10-09 07:36)**

Life with 2-year-old Syliva is such a treat. That girl! She sparkles like sunshine making diamonds on water. She twirls and giggles and dashes off. She snuggles down and tells you what she's thinking about. Her vocabulary and complexity of speech has been expanding amazingly these last months. I often shake my head in disbelief as I hear her have adorable conversations with Andrew.

Sometimes, the flow of conversation with a 2-year-old is a little less than straight forward. For example, here's a snippet of dialogue from a couple days ago:

Me: "Sylvia, I sure do like you. I'm glad your my daughter."

Sylvia: (smiles warmly) -pause- "You, you, you, you like ham?" - pause- "You like monsters in the tubby?"

Also, I don't think I gave it the full blog post it deserved, but Sylvia has a deep and abiding commitment to swim wear. She wore swimming suits about 90 % of the time this summer. To bed, she wore a different swimming suit than she had worn during the day. When we went out in public, she would agree to put on clothes over her swimming suit (in the car, just before going in), and then when we left the library/restaurant/market, she would immediately remove the offending clothing. As the weather has turned chilly (it was 34 degrees this morning!), I've been a little concerned about how she'd deal. Fortunately, she's mostly self regulated. I wear wool socks, jeans, a shirt, and a sweat shirt. She wears a t-shirt, shorts, and bare feet. Yesterday, she tried to play outdoors with a swimming suit, and she had lots of goosebumps, but she took personal offense to my suggestions that she try more layers. Oh well!

In addition to loving swim suits, Sylvia has developed a somewhat compulsive habit of changing her clothes many times. On days that she's feeling a little "off," she seems to pin the fault on her attire. It's totally normal for her to change her clothes six to eight times before lunch...perhaps looking for the outfit combo that will help her soul feel more peaceful. Her room is strewn constantly with clothes and swim suits of all kinds. I've pretty much stopped folding her clothes.

When we go out, it's pretty common for little Sylv to get lots of looks and comments. Today, she was wearing dress shoes with little heels and was carrying one of my purses. Between her accessories and her incredible smile, and radiant joie de vivre, she elicits lots of smiles. Alternatively, she elicits looks of shock and fear when her inner volcano erupts. "Take cover, everyone!!"

Here's a little note I jotted down a few weeks ago about a Sylvia dressing moment:

"Sylv puts on her non-PJ swim suit and a crown. Then she realizes that it's not the right choice and tries on a different swimming suit and then tosses the crown, saying, 'I don't need That!'"

Here are a few of my favorite pictures of Sylvia from this summer. What a wonderful world it is to have her in it!

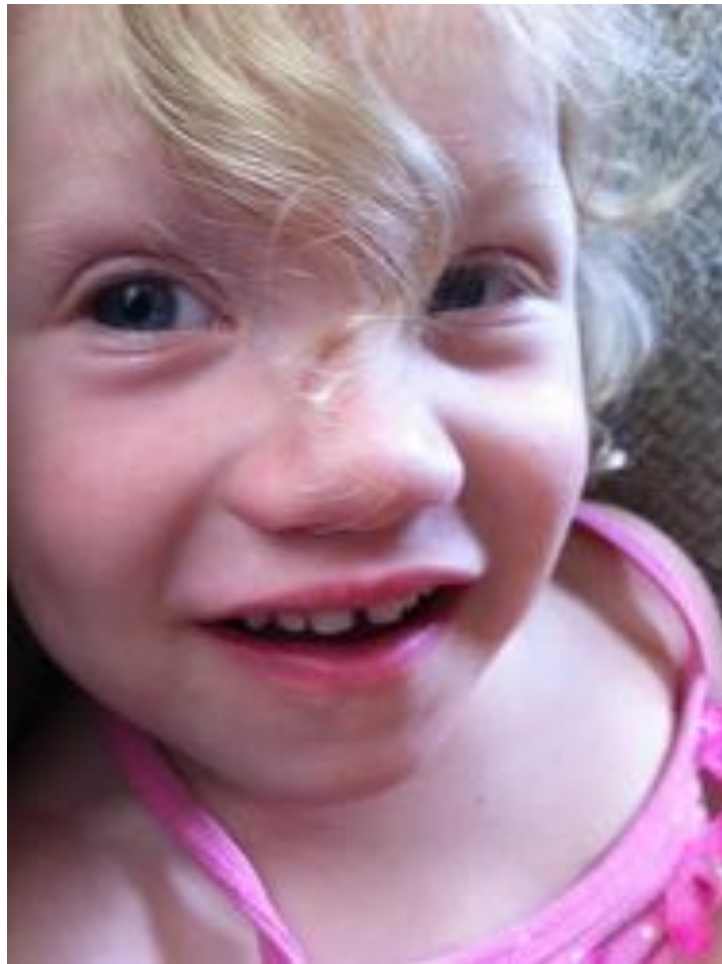




















In other news, Andrew still calls vitamins "Bite a Mins." So all is right in my world:)

### **Faaaalllling! (2010-10-11 06:54)**

My cousin Sarah lives in Toronto. Sarah is, for those who know me, my mom's older brother Peter's daughter. Over the last 33 years of my life, I've seen Sara and her brothers only rarely, but when I do, I always enjoy our time together. They're a fun, creative, tall, and pretty hilarious group.

Sarah...my cousin-in-Toronto...has a blog, which I consider to be a great thing because she is a pretty insightful and humerus writer.

A couple weeks ago, Sarah posted a story on her blog about a recent sky diving experience. I so enjoyed reading it. My heart pounded in my chest while I read. I encourage you to take a few moments to experience vicariously what my crazy daring cousin tried. What a way to celebrate a birthday!

To whet your appetite, here's an excerpt from her post "I had a dream...":

I just fell 2000 feet and it felt like nothing. I'm not screaming or making any noise. However, I am aware my mouth is wide open as I am in awe of this sensation, of heavy wind blowing on me, but I never really feel like I am falling, and after a while, the wind feels alternatively soft and cushiony and then hard and dull on my body. This is terminal velocity.

I peer at my altimeter again, in a dreamlike haze.

7500 feet.

Almost time to pull the chute. I reach back to touch the orange ball on Mike's hip.

6000 feet.

Mouth still wide open, all the air entering my body, air I'm sure I've never breathed before and will never breathe again.

### **Madison Mun Run (2010-10-13 21:31)**



Here's a picture swiped from the Madison Mud Run website to give you some flavor

This blog post constitutes an open invitation to join me and Bryan and some of our assorted friends in a crazy run on Halloween morn. The Madison Mud Run is a 5 mile race taking place in Verona. I'm really excited! Bryan signed us up (Melanie's going to be in town, and she's joining us!!!). Our team name is the Mud Mummies. So when you sign up, list your team as the Mud Mummies, and join in our kooky camaraderie! We're encouraged to run in costume, so I got a little pink tutu and some pink cat ears. Not sure what kind of cat wears a tutu, but that'll be me.

The thing that drew me to this race was the ridiculousness of it. It's got 16 obstacles. Here's info on them from the website:

Obstacles: This event will be filled with obstacles including:

1. Wicked Water Crossing: Waste deep cold water that will get you dirty and wet early in the race.
2. Freaky Foam Tunnel: A dark tunnel with Halloween themed music and strobe lights filled with sudsy foam.
3. Witch's Wall Climb: A 5' tall wall with rock climbing holds to help you scale it.
4. Spooktacular Slippery Slope: A short, steep climb that is difficult to reach the top.
5. Haunted Forest: A dark forest filled with creepy ghosts and goblins.
6. Creepy Crawl: 30" plastic tubes that are 10 feet long. Crawl through these tubes to reach the other side.
7. Obstacle Course of Doom: A 52' long inflatable obstacle course that includes barriers, a wall climb, and a fun slide.
8. Terrifying Tires: A pile of tires that is sure to slow even the fastest runners. Watch your step as you navigate the treacherous terrain.
9. Hell's Hurdles: Picture a steep hill, going up of course, filled with hay bale hurdles to slow your ascent. Stay fast and smooth to clear these hurdles.
10. Skeleton Slip and Slide: 100' of scary slip and slide, just like when you were a kid. And just the the skeleton in the Olympics!
11. Werewolf Wall Climb: Another 5' tall wall climb. This one has ropes to help you get over it.
12. Black Cat Balance Beams: 4 inches wide and 40 feet long. These beams are guaranteed to test your focus and footing.
13. Spider Web Crawl: A 6 foot high pyramid of cargo nets. Can you be the fastest spider through this challenging web?
14. Pyramid of Pumpkins: A pyramid built from hay bales and pumpkins. Scale this pyramid and head for the last two obstacles. You are almost there!

15. Scarecrow's Swamp Crossing: One more challenge to slow you down and make sure you remain wet and muddy throughout this event. This is just a warm up for the Mud Pit that is awaiting you.

16. Mummy's Mud Pit: Knee deep mud that participants MUST crawl through. This mud will surely be cold, but don't let that stop you. The showers and free beer and chicken wings await you at the finish line!

If anything, these obstacles should provide a nice opportunity to catch a couple breaths! I hope the weather's not too cold! And what to wear? Probably something disposable!

Adam, Ashleigh, Anne, Julie, Natalie...you've all said that you're interested. I hope to see you there!!

### **Princess Sylvia (2010-10-19 12:33)**

When we walk into the gym to go to my MamaTone fitness class, we're greeted by an over-sized poster of a lady weight lifting. Sylvia loves this poster. She talks about it before we get there, and as we walk in, she always spends a good deal of energy contemplating this big, strong woman. She calls her The Princess. And depending on the day, she lets me know that a) it's me, or b) it's Sylvia when she's a big, big mommy.





Sylvia notes that The Princess has on red chapstick.



I'm not sure what it is about this woman that has so captured my daughter's fascination, but one thing's for sure...when she goes to MamaTone next time, Sylvia will be admiring her.

### **First Halloween Party (2010-10-20 07:11)**

On Sunday, Andrew and Sylvia and I attended a Halloween bash at a preschool friend's home. It was so much fun! They went totally overboard with the decorations and activities and costumes. A wizard came and gave a show to a rapt audience. And the kids and I ate a truly exceptional quantity of cupcakes, jello, cookies, candies, cheese puffs, and other delectables.

Here's the entrance to their back yard...



The family graveyard...



Moments after arriving, the kids consume (the frosting only) of cupcake #1.



Here's Andrew's friend Olivia from preschool. She's a cute purple kitty.



Andrew the giraffe (circa 2008) with preschool friends Jeffrey and Roan.





Here's Sylvia hunting for some lollipop ghosts. The scab on her nose is from a dive she took off the front steps (onto concrete) a week ago).



During the magic show, I had fun photographing the crowd.



What great costumes!



Since the firefly costumes aren't done (started) yet, the kids got to pick from our large array of costumes. Andrew picked the giraffe, and Sylvia picked first the lion and then the blue bunny and finally the pink tutu that I'm going to wear on the Mud Run on Halloween. For her, every day is dress up day.



The kids loved the show! There's Olivia again with her little pink pumpkin sister Haley.





YUM. Cheese puffs. My kids didn't realize that the world held such flavors:)



There's the vets, Mike and Laura with the purple kitty Olivia and the pink pumpkin Haley.





The weather was perfect...warm and clear. But as night fell, the fire sure felt nice!



What great decorations and what a great party! Thanks guys, for a great evening!!



### **Mun Run - What fun!!! (2010-10-31 12:04)**

Bryan's' sister Melanie is visiting us from her home in Dallas this weekend. We've been having a great time together. Melanie joined me and Bryan in a a crazy event called the Madison Mud Run. When we woke up this morning, the thermometer read 27 degrees. Yikes!

Fortunately, the day warmed up (all the way to 40 degrees:) And even though she's from warm Texas, Melanie was game to join in our cold weather kooky-ness.

And the run was a lot of fun!

Here are some pics of us before we started:











In those pictures, I don't think we look as cold as we felt!

Then, after our 4-5 mile race and 16 obstacles, here's how we looked:











We all had a great time! Now, I'm ready for a hot shower:)

### **Halloween 2010 (2010-10-31 21:42)**

Bryan's sister, Melanie, has been visiting us this past weekend. We anticipated her visit with such excitement, and it was positively wonderful to have her here. I wish we could keep her here with us always!!

Mel has a long tradition of visiting us "up north" in the fall, and it's such fun to have her here over Halloween! Here's some pics of our evening festivities.

The kids both wanted to be Blaze the firefly from the Tinkerbell movies. Sylvia differentiated by declaring that she wanted to be a "mommy firefly." In recent days, she changed and decided she wanted to be a "mommy rat." I said that was fine as long as she wore the wings I sewed for her.





The kid's costumes consisted of black clothes, bobble headbands, sewn wings (black set on top, silver on the bottom), and some yellow LED lights. In Sylvia's case, I wound them through her yellow tutu. In Andrew's case, I affixed them in a baggie on his behind. They looked pretty cute!

At supper tonight, Sylvia decided that she was going to be a lion (Andrew's lion costume from 2007). The girl changes her mind...frequently. However, she decided at the last minute to wear the firefly skirt but not the wings.







We did some pumpkin carving this weekend.



Here's the one Andrew designed and Bryan cut out (Bryan added the horns).



And here's Mellie's cute pumpkin. One scary (Andrew's), one happy (Melanie's).



Two of our nine back-yard-grown pumpkins became Jack-o-Lanterns.



Here's Miss Sylv without her wings but with her cute glowing skirt.





Halloween sure is exciting!!



Here's our crew before heading out. We visited seven houses. After five, both kids were ready to head home:)



They looked so sweet going up to doors together!



After getting candy, they liked to take a quick break and eat a bit of their loot.



Here's Sylvia and Andrew getting their photo taken by our neighbor, Cindy. Sylvia turned to look at me just as I took the pic.



Having kids is a lot of fun!





Heading back home...



Warming up with Aunt Mel.



Tomorrow (Monday) morning), Melanie and Sylvia head down to Texas. Sylvia will be spending the week at Granny and Grandad's house. Sylv is so excited! She's been packing her bag for the last few days. I fly down on Friday to pick her up. It's going to be an exciting week for her, and an exciting week for me! Happy travels, girls!

## 6.11 November

### **Dia de los muertos (2010-11-02 07:31)**

I woke up early this morning (first to go to boot camp) and then to shape and rise my pan de muerto. Today - November 2 - is Dia de los Muertos. Andrew has been learning about and preparing for this celebratory day at Kindergarten, and so I thought we'd celebrate as a family too. Last night before going to bed, he drew a picture of my mom for the alter they have set up in the classroom to honor deceased ancestors. I told him he could alternatively or also draw pictures of any of his great-grand parents who are no longer with us, but he said he'd like to draw just Grandma Margot because, "She was your mom."

For those of you (like I was a few months ago) who are unfamiliar with this ancient holiday, here's a little summary.

"Día de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead) is one of Mexico's most traditional holidays, reuniting and honoring beloved ancestors, family and friends.

It is a celebration going back hundreds of years, that Aztec, Mayan, Toltec, Nahua, Tlaxcaltec, Chichimec and Tecpan indigenous peoples used to practice. In the Mexican culture, through this tradition, death seems to hold no terror.

"Día de los Muertos" is not a mournful commemoration, but instead, a happy and colorful celebration where death takes on a lively, friendly expression and is not a frightening stranger. A very beautiful, commemorative and colorfully adorned table with mementos of the departed, their favorite foods and symbolic offerings like water, salt and pictures of the loved one, is created. This is called the "altar," where candles dispel the darkness, just as the souls are being illuminated from the shadows of death.

My recipe for pan de muerto comes from Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*. I can't attest to the actual bread yet (it's still rising), but the dough is unbelievable! It's like cinnamon challah with extra butter:)

In honor of Dia de los Muertos, here are some photos of our beloved deceased ancestors. I hope to think of them often with a smile today.

Here's my mommy: Margot







Here's Bryan's paternal grandpa: Dandy (a.k.a. Grover)





Here are my sweet paternal grandparents:Grandma (Lucille) and Grandpa (Mike) Babler

flickr



This photo is no longer available

Here is Grandma Harey (a.k.a. Lola Mae)



Those are the deceased ancestors for whom I have digital pictures. Bryan's Great-Grandma Doll passed away in 1999, and my maternal Grandpa Joe passed away in the early '70s. Oh, I did just find a photo of Grandpa Joe.

That's Grandpa Joe standing in the middle (between his parents??). My mom is on the bottom right with Peter, Kirk, and Katie to her left.



I hope you can find some festive and joyful ways to honor your deceased loved ones today! I'm intrigued by this holiday that attempts to translate pain into celebration. Should be fun!

Fondly,

Althea

## Hair cuts! (2010-11-04 22:49)

A couple weeks ago, Andrew and Sylvia turned a quiet afternoon into a self-hair cutting extravaganza.

It was after school on a wet day, and Andrew and Sylvia wanted to watch a show. I had some photography phone calls to make, so I agreed. They also wanted to do some art projects, so I helped them get paper and crayons and paper. And then I sat down at the kitchen table to work and make calls.

Andrew came in a couple times to get snacks.

And then I didn't see them for a while.

The quiet had a funny sound to it, so I went into the living room to check on them.

And then I screamed.

I slapped my hands to either side of my face as if I was trying to hold my head together.



Lying on the floor was about four cups of Andrew's curls. And both Andrew and Sylvia had their scissors up to their heads and were looking at me wide-eyed in mid-cut.



Sylvia dropped her scissors from her trimming and clapped her hands over her ears.

I kept my hands holding my head together as I surveyed the scene, muttering something like, "Ohmygosh, ohmygosh, whatwereyouTHINKING???. OK OK OK OK Ok ok ok ok WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!?!?"

Sylvia is looking at me with shock and alarm, and Andrew is looking at me, with his very shorn head, with confidence and righteousness. No contriteness there.









I considered making him go around for a few days with the haircut he gave himself, but knowing him, he would think that was great. And even if the kids at school thought he looked funny, he probably wouldn't care. And then perhaps I'd be stuck with him wearing this ridiculous mullet-type cut. So I sadly sat him down and finished the job.



Here he is a few days later.

1680





Really, there's nothing wrong with his short cut. It's just a short boy cut. But oh, his curls! And the humanity of it all!

I told him that in the future if he wants his hair cut, HE NEEDS TO ASK FIRST. I'm curious when and if we'll see his lovely curls again.

Sylvia's cut was less dramatic, so for the first day or so afterward, I didn't even really notice it. But then I realized that all her curls on the right side of her head had been lopped off. She didn't shear it off close to the scalp (thank heavens), but she's got a whole area of her head with hair about an inch long.





For a little pop-culture reference, Sylvia's 'do actually reminds me a little of Rhiana...

✘ She's oh, so trendy!

Oh well. It's just hair and it grows back. And now that the trauma is in the past, I've mostly recovered.

And the scissors? They've been removed from circulation!

### **Mel's visit (2010-11-06 07:04)**

It was so much fun to have Melanie come visit us over Halloween weekend this year. We've enjoyed having her come north quite a few autumns over the last eleven years.

Here we are at the farmer's market on Saturday morning. There's so much good produce to find!



Playing in the yard!



Raking up the leaves.



Aren't I married to a handsome man?!





Sigh. Gold leaves.





Our yard in the fall



Sibs



Sylvia and her daddy. A new favorite picture.



Pumpkins and mums



Sweet sister!





Love this one!!!!



Thanks for flying up to see us (and for taking Sylvia back home with you! Can't wait to see you for Thanksgiving!

### **Autumn outings (2010-11-07 11:07)**

October slipped by. Our tree in our front yard turned the most amazing golden color this year. When the sun shone through the leaves, I was mesmerized. I don't think that there could be a more beautiful site. The kids liked it too, and I made up a story for them about how Bryan and I take our extra money and make it into gold and store it in the tree just so that for a few glorious days in the fall we can see what happens when leaves turn into papery thin pieces of gold.

Below, you'll see some pictures of some late-October outings we took.

This is a pile of nuts that Sylvia found and stuffed into my pockets while we went for a walk:





Silly girl on the trail.



And there's Andrew back when he had curls...



The kids and I were hiking at Kagonza State Park. We'd gone the night before to attend a night-time walk with the trail lit by jack-o-lanterns. However as we were walking in, Andrew (who was running) tripped and scraped up his elbow. It was game over, and we all piled back into the car and headed home. So the next morning, I thought we'd try again.



Sylvia's red mark on her nose is from where she fell down the front porch steps and landed on her face. No permanent damage done.





Andrew pretends to chop down a sapling. Note that Sylvie has Poodle stuffed down her pants:)





Here's a different day...our last outing to the apple orchard.



Sylvia wore swim suits every day all summer. As the weather turned cold, she still wore them but added warmer items like a hat and mittens. Then she started wearing clothes on top of the swimming suits. When Bryan packed all the suits up and put them in the basement a few weeks ago, there amazingly wasn't a whisper of complaint!



Sorry this picture is rotated funny. Here it is corrected. I love when the two of them are sitting together on the front step, enjoying each other's company. Plus, just look at Andrew's curls!

flickr



This photo is no longer available

Some painting...





Alivia lost her first tooth!



Enjoying some Culver's left-overs



Here we're taking a trip to Schuster's Playtime Farm near Cambridge with Jessica and Celia.





Two girls enjoying the fences. Sylvia is so non-phased by large livestock that (as her mother) it's almost disturbing.



Hello, chicken!



Bye bye October!



## Our fireflies (2010-11-08 08:55)

I finished the kid's firefly capes a couple days before Halloween. Thanks to Jessica for lending me her sewing machine.

Here are a series of pictures of the kids trying on their costumes and pretending to be fireflies...

Sylvia, if you were wondering, is actually a mommy firefly.

















Some notes on the capes. There's two layers - the black top wings and the silver under wings. Just like real beetles:) I made them with a magnet closure, but the magnets were sadly not strong enough. So they are now safety pinned together and perhaps someday I will get velcro so the kids can take them on and off themselves. Pretty simple costume, but I've got to say that I really enjoy having their costumes appear fully handmade by Granny!

It was a fun Halloween:)

### **Back yard soccer with friends (2010-11-09 07:49)**

Autumn is such a beautiful time! Here are some pictures of some backyard playtime we had with Jessica, Eli, and Celia in late October.

The boys were having a great time kicking the soccer ball around...



I just love the gold leaves!





Happy, active boys.



Sylvia (wearing a Sylvia-ensemble...including markers on the face) looks on.







GOAL!!!!





Meanwhile, Celia bikes on the driveway.



She lost her clog, but Sylvia is there to help her get it back on.





I love this picture! Jessica took it:)



Handsome bay.



And another handsome boy! Eli's bottom left tooth is loose! This particular smile won't last long!



**Camera equipment for sale – Complete Canon SLR set-up (2010-11-09 16:16)**

<Update: SOLD Thanks!!>

If you're interested in a fabulous Canon camera package, I've got a deal for you! This kit served me really well, and I loved all the equipment. I'm making a switch to Nikon, and I'm putting my complete Canon SLR photo kit up for sale.





Items include:

- Canon 40d SLR camera (originally \$1,130 with 28-135mm lens)
- 28-135mm f3.5-5.6 IS lens with Dolica UV filter and circular polarizer filter (originally \$15)
- 50mm f1.8 lens (originally \$120) with Promaster precision UV filter (originally \$45)
- Three batteries and battery charger (originally \$85)
- Interface cable (no video cable), Canon strap, software and instructions
- Promaster 7500EDF Canon external flash (originally \$285)
- Lowepro SlingShot 100 camera bag (originally \$80)

Total original purchase price totals \$1,760.

I am selling the entire set for \$900!

Click on the pictures to see a bigger image.

All equipment has been carefully maintained and used in my professional portrait photography business.

The Canon 40D camera and 28-135mm lens were purchased in June 2008. The camera has 58,823 shutter actuations (clicks).















The camera and lenses are in excellent condition and show no obvious signs of wear. Note that this set does not include CF memory cards, which would need to be purchased separately.

The Canon 50mm lens is in excellent condition (always used with a UV filter) and is wonderful for portraits and low-light.

Here's some shots of the 28-135 lens:





and here's the 50mm lens...





The Promaster external flash has only been used a handful of times and is in mint condition.







The all-weather SlingShot 100 camera bag fits the equipment well and is in good working condition, although it shows mild signs of loving wear.



If you're interested, contact me at [adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com) or 608.223.9539.

### **Sibling jobs (2010-11-11 07:30)**

It's always really fun to see people I love getting to do work that they feel really positive about. In the last month or two, both Mareta and Joe have gotten new jobs.

My little brother, Joe, graduated from Bowdoin College in May. He spent the month of June here in Madison, and then from July through August he interned in Senator Feingold's office. Through that time, and for about a month afterward, he became a professional job applier. After a couple months of riding an emotional roller coaster

consisting of interviews and second interviews and no job offers, Joe landed a job that he's thrilled with. He started a couple weeks ago.

Joe's official title? Research Associate for the Energy and Natural Resource Program



Joe's place of work? Taxpayers for Common Sense This organization is "a non-partisan budget watchdog serving as an independent voice for American taxpayers." Their mission is to "achieve a government that spends taxpayer dollars responsibly and operates within its means. They work with individuals, policymakers, and the media to increase transparency, expose and eliminate wasteful and corrupt subsidies, earmarks, and corporate welfare, and hold decision makers accountable."

In addition to providing administrative support for the energy and natural resources staff, Joe will be researching and writing white papers and fact sheets, and he'll be writing regular content for their website.

He's now got an apartment in DC with two friends from Bowdoin. And he's working on capitol hill! What an exciting time:)

Maretta got a new job this fall working for a theatrical costume and makeup company in the Twin Cities. I'm excited for her to be trying something new and working at a job with links to her heart's desire...acting.

Way to go, sibs!

### **Sibling love (2010-11-12 09:25)**

This is a two-part post about the Andrew/Sylvia relationship as I saw it this morning:

#### Part I - The good

Andrew and Sylvia are so cute together! They wake up and rush for their vitamins. They dole them out for each other, and then they leap about exclaiming in mutual glee what they want for breakfast. Sylvia carefully watches Andrew and mimics his expressions and his moves. Except when he's mimicking her. After breakfast this morning, they crawled into Andrew's bed. She snuggled down under the comforter next to him, and he read her a couple chapters of Frog and Toad. I leaned on the door frame and took in the beauty and comfort of their relationship. The



way Sylvia adores Andrew. The joy he gets from her company. It's such a wonder and a gift that they have each other.

## Part II - The not-so-good

Moments after stumbling out of bed and greeting each other, the conflict begins. Sylvia wants a purple spoon with her breakfast. One of the COVETED purple spoons. Andrew says that both the purple spoons should stay in the drawer until they can use them together (he already has an orange spoon). Sylv persists. Andrew holds the silverware drawer closed with his body. Sylvia pulls hard on to open it. Voices are raised. Sylvia shrieks. The kids have been awake for about 4 minutes, and I'm threatening to get rid of both purple spoons if there is any more conflict over the stupid purple spoons. Andrew demures. Sylvia gets the purple spoon <Note to self: Andrew gets the purple spoon next.>

The kids sit down at breakfast and begin laughing and giggling about a thumbs up/thumbs down game they're playing. Suddenly, they're not on the same page. Andrew's giving something a thumbs down. Sylvie isn't happy. Andrew begins frowning, grunting, and saying, "No. NO. NO!" Sylvia starts to yell something. "Yes!!!" "NOOOO!" "YESSSS!!!!" Just when I'm about to end breakfast and have them take turns eating since they obviously can't seem to do it together, they work it out, and it's on to the next thing.

Is it any wonder that I sometimes feel a little dizzy?





## Girls on the Run (2010-11-16 13:32)

On Saturday morning, a few friends from Bootcamp and I participated in a 5K in Waunakee called Girls on the Run. While we just ran the race for fun, the majority of the participants were elementary school girls and their parents. Girls on the Run is an after-school program held in elementary schools that works to build self-esteem and self-respect among young girls while they train for the 5K. What a cool program! It was so neat to see all these girls as they got ready to run.



Pictured is Nicole, me, Deb, and Julie.

Race day morning was cold and rainy. And then cold and very rainy. Here's a pic of us at race start. My goal for the race was to beat my Zoo Run Run time. The time they called at the finish was a little slower than that time (boo!), but the published race results show that I was a bit faster (yay!).

11/13/10										Page 1
OVERALL 5K RESULTS										
2010 GOTR 5K										
Wausau, Wisconsin										10:00 am
Girls on the Run Dane Co.										Brisk
New Balance GOTR 5K										
Overall	Sex	Age	AgeGr	BB#	NAME	Age	sex	FINISH	Time	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	1	1		618	Scott McDermott	36	M	20:06	6:29	
2	2	1		605	Todd Boerboom	31	M	20:21	6:53	
3	1	1		834	Kelley Rittman	13	F	20:24	6:34	
4	3	1		963	Chris Furey	35	M	20:31	6:37	
5	4	1		844	Gus Newcomb	12	M	20:32	6:37	
6	5	1		813	Mark Worwic	37	M	20:34	6:37	
7	2	2		934	Ellie Oegen	13	F	21:17	6:51	
8	6	1		884	Doug Erickson	46	M	21:19	6:52	
9	7			1029	Pete Daly		M	21:22	6:53	
10	8	1		616	Alan Hines	28	M	21:53	7:03	
11	3	3		930	Halle Kincher-Henning	13	F	22:01	7:06	
12	9	1		809	Tristen Abbott	16	M	22:13	7:09	
13	10	1		973	Oliver Rydsten	11	M	22:27	7:13	
14	4	1		942	Jaclyn Schroeder	23	F	22:33	7:15	
15	11	1		778	Parker Griebel	14	M	22:35	7:16	
16	5	2		835	Hannah Rittman	12	F	22:40	7:17	
17	12	1		833	Greg Rittman	53	M	22:58	7:43	
18	13	1		981	Justin Stewart	27	M	23:59	7:44	
19	6	2		664	Erma Helice	11	F	24:03:00	7:45	
20	7	3		631	Elise Drull	12	F	24:06:00	7:46	
21	8	2		564	Chelsea Myers	28	F	24:07:00	7:46	
22	9	4		492	Ashley Stahrke	13	F	24:13:00	7:48	
23	14	1		683	Don Drull	45	M	24:22:00	7:51	
24	15	1		896	Zachary Marek	9	M	24:24:00	7:52	
25	16	2		491	Todd Stahrke	46	M	24:32:00	7:54	
26	17	1		806	Michael Poeschl	26	M	24:36:00	7:55	
27	10	1		789	Kelley Flury	44	F	24:50:00	8:00	
28	11	2		675	Lindsay Schwab	31	F	25:04:00	8:04	
29	12	1		610	Chelsea Metzger	32	F	25:08:00	8:06	
30	13			1026	Athoa Dettler		F	25:11:00	8:13	
31	14	1		686	Jamie Edge	30	F	25:15:00	8:14	
32	18	1		997	Gary Moeller	54	M	25:17:00	8:15	
33	15	2		808	Madelene Abbott	14	F	25:19:00	8:16	
34	19	3		624	Eric Chow	28	M	25:26:00	8:21	

I sure do enjoy running these races! Bryan, Melanie, LuAnn, and I are signed up for a Turkey Trot in College Station on Thanksgiving morning. And I've just signed up for the Jingle Bell Run 5K on Saturday, December 11 at 10:45am. My team name is "Yippy Skippy," so if you're interested in joining, you can sign up here: <http://jbrmadison.kintera.org/>.

I'm hoping to run the Shamrock Shuffle and maybe some other 5Ks next spring. Then I think I'll up to the 10Ks when the weather warms. If you'd like to run with me, just let me know!

### Playing in Texas (2010-11-30 14:36)

We're back home after a great week-long vacation in Texas with our Dotzour family. We sure do all have fun together:) We left on Monday morning - drove to Chicago, and then flew through Dallas to College Station. After weeks of anticipation and a long day of travel (the kids did great), we were really happy to be there!

Love this pic of thoughtful Sylvie and her doting daddy. <When Sylvie saw this picture just now, she said, "I'm thinking, I want my paci and poodle.">



The kids have a whole slew of games that they love to play at Granny and Grandad's house. One of their favs is To Grandma's House We Go. I think Granny has probably played this game with the kids 100 times:)



Looking in as we sit down for supper. LuAnn fed us really well. Mmmmmemories.





After supper, the kids delighted in cookies (out of the giraffe cookie jar) and heart-shaped jello. Sylvie says, "I like the cookies!"







By looking at this picture, I'd say she likes the jello too!



Goofy girl!



Andrew had a great monster-drawing game. He'd ask a Magic 8-ball about the monster features, "Does the monster have bat ears?" "Does the monster have six arms?" and then he'd draw the results. Granny and Grandad made their monster versions too, and then they'd make up stories chronicling the monsters' adventures.



On Thanksgiving morning, LuAnn, Melanie, Bryan, and I had fun running a 5K. What an active bunch:) Our team name was "Bring on the Stuffing!" So I can remember in the future, I was #37 out of 305 with a time of 24:50 (that's 7:59 min miles). My best time yet...YES!



It sure was nice and relaxing to all hang out together. Thanks, everyone for a great vacation:)

## 6.12 December

### Giving thanks for 2010 (2010-12-01 07:36)

Thanksgiving Day. A fun day of relaxing and playing. Granny did nearly all the cooking (with moderate assistance from Melanie and even more moderate assistance by me). I took a little time to photograph some of the prettiness around the house.

Here's the fall wreath on the front door.





Granny got some materials for the kids to make place cards. So cute!





Pilgrims and Indians and the napkin rings made by the kids.



Beautiful Thanksgiving flowers sent by Grandma Jo.



Meanwhile, my half-naked children played games. Here's Sylvia coloring with Grandad.



and Andrew and Bryan playing a game of Quirkle. Andrew caught on to this game right-fast!



The weather was balmy for the first few days of our trip (high seventies!), but on Thanksgiving, a cold front blew in, and we all got a little chilly! Here's Sylvia (wearing a dress that used to be Melanie's) and Bryan watching Grandad and Andrew playing with a remote control car.



Grandad steers and Andrew leaps about in front of the crazy car.



Here's my sis Melanie looking svelte and fabulous.



Me and my girl (thanks for taking the picture, Grandad!).





Here's our lovely Thanksgiving table.





Grandad carves the turkey.



So much good food!



Yum! I hope your Thanksgiving celebrations were warm and loving and full of all your favorite foods.



We have so much to be grateful for - good health, wonderful family, treasured friends, warm homes, full kitchens, peace, and contentment. Wishing you all a gratitude-filled year!

### **Hanukkah dinner with snowflakes (2010-12-02 07:18)**

I made a dinner last night that was yummy enough that I wanted to share the recipes.

Andrew came home from school talking about Hanukkah, so we spent some time yesterday afternoon talking about some Hanukkah traditions. We decided to make latkes (which, for the record, he then refused to taste). Sylvie helped put the potatoes into the food processor, I pressed out as much moisture as I could, and using this recipe, I fired up some delicious potato pancakes. I've only fried food a hand full of times before, and I've never had what I'd call success. But using the right amount of peanut oil and keeping the heat on medium, these latkes turned out golden and scrumptious. How do you convince a newly-picky-eating five year old that they're just french fries in different form. And he can dip them in sour cream or apple sauce! Silly boy.

I had some chicken thighs in the freezer and a jar of honey mustard in the fridge, so I looked up those ingredients and made this honey baked chicken recipe. It was an unexpectedly huge hit. There were groanings of pleasure. I think this recipe (easy as it is!) might make a repeat showing.

Andrew also learned how to make paper snowflakes in school today. Since the Hair Cutting Incident of 2010, we've banned scissors from the home. However, we'd planned to bring them back (with highly supervised use) in December. My kids happen to L.O.V.E. to cut paper with scissors, so after a couple months of scissors austerity, Andrew and Sylvia happily snipped at paper while I cooked supper. And we have snowflakes hanging on many windows.

Our house is decorated, holiday music is playing, and the kids are so excited about all the holiday magic. Already - SO EXCITED. I've been encouraging them to pace themselves;) Hope your December is off to a good start! Enjoy the twinkly lights:)



**Sylvia recites (2010-12-03 10:30)**

Quick little story:

This morning, Sylvia was sitting at the breakfast table alone while I went to get dressed. From my bedroom, I hear her clear little voice reciting,

"Baby was TWO YEARS OLD and never wanted to come in for dinner and never wanted to take a bath. When grandma visited, said bad words!

But at night time Mama would crawl across the floor and look up over side of his bed. Pick up that great big boy and slowly rocked back and forth back and forth back and forth.

Sang, 'Love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be.'"

I think my heart stopped a little while I listened. We haven't read that book (I'll Love You Forever) in weeks. And I had no idea that she knew any of the words, much less a whole (somewhat mixed up) segment of the book. Amazing! I so wanted to covertly video her, but it was fleeting, and I knew if she saw me she'd stop.

My girl is two months shy of three, and I'm starting to see a lot more of a preschooler in my toddler!



For those of you not familiar with the story Sylvia was reading, here's a link to the text. <sob>

### **Hope your December and Christmas was merry and bright! (2010-12-26 12:38)**

Oh, boy, it's been quite a busy and less-than-healthy month in the Dotzour home. I just looked on my site and realized that I haven't written a post since December 3! Oops. So now I'm wondering...do I catch up with early December, or do I jump right into the Christmas celebrations from the last couple days? Decisions, decisions.

Well, as a compromise, I'll upload all our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day pics to the gallery, so anyone who wants a visual of the Christmas festivities can see them. And then I'll write some posts for catch up. As a quick spoiler, we had a wonderful celebration. I don't think I've stopped smiling all weekend.

I hope that everyone out there enjoyed a lovely Christmas and that you are now (or will soon) get to have what we in the Babler family refer to as Slug Day. Staying in pajamas, playing with toys, watching movies, snuggling down, and relaxing for many hours after the excitement of the last days and weeks.





### **December preparations (2010-12-27 07:45)**

This December was such an exciting and magical one for the kids. Seems like being ages 2 and 5 is pretty much ideal for making December a month where we wandered through a magical time of excitement and anticipation.





The day after we got home from Texas post-Thanksgiving, we went out to Jung's and got our tree (a balsam fir again). The kids took all of 30 seconds to pick it out. As we have in past years (and as Andrew remembered that we had done in past years), we went to Culver's afterward for lunch. These kids sure do love their Culver's. Andrew has recently discovered chicken fingers, and he longs for his vanilla custard with cookie dough sprinkles on top.

After getting back home, we got it up right away. The kids were so excited to help get the decorations up from the basement and to help decorate the tree and house.



Bowser likes when it's Christmas tree time too. He likes drinking from the tree water:)



Here's Andrew putting up the lights. He looks so grown up with his short hair!



There's Sylvia decorating her one square foot of the tree.



The result of her decorating efforts. That spot was well-covered!



Later on... so pretty!



Here's a little one-foot tree that I gave to Andrew to put in his room. He decorated it by putting all the little ornaments on the top. So cute:)





I loved seeing how delighted the kids were to explore my Christmas decorations. The music boxes were a big hit as was anything with Santa on it. And the kids really enjoyed playing with the nativity this year.



After supper most nights, we read some of our Christmas books. *The Grinch*, *The Night Before Christmas*, *The Polar Express*, *My Wonderful Christmas Tree*, and *Christmas Magic* were all big hits this year. We had Christmas music (most of it jazz, piano, Celtic, or world) playing most afternoons. We baked cut out cookies and Linzer squares and spritz cookies and magic bars. Several evenings in December, we piled the kids in the car after dinner and drove around enjoying all the beautiful Christmas lights. We shopped almost exclusively online except for some last-minute store-shopping.

It was a fun-filled month. An active month. The Christmas Eve and Day celebrations were a great culmination to our month of planning and preparations. Hope your December was a good one too!

### **Christmas Letter 2010 (2010-12-28 10:15)**

I love Christmas cards! It's so fun to visit the mailbox all through the month of December and see the writing of friends and family on the cards inside. I love reading people's letters and seeing pictures of growing families. We have so many friends and family who live far afield, and it warms my heart to catch up with the annual cards.

Here's a copy of the card and the letter that sums up the Dotzour Family in late 2010...

*Jingle*



*Jingle Jingle*



December 2010

Greetings to our family and friends!

I hope that this Christmas finds you in good health and with a contented heart. It's fun to have a white Christmas here in Madison. The kids have been thrilled to discover and re-discover all the magical traditions this year. Cookies! Lights! Decorations! Special books and movies and songs! Oh, and need I add...Presents!!! It's wonderful to experience the holidays through the eyes of my five- and two-year old.

2010 has been a nice year in the Dotzour home. Bowser, who is sitting on my lap as I type, asked me to tell you that he and Spooky turned 10-years-old this year. Funny that the tiny kittens we got when we'd only been married a year are turning into "old men!"

Our extended family has been doing great with the sad exceptions of Bryan's Grandma Harvey and my Uncle Greg who both passed away earlier this year. Our thoughts are with Grandpa Harvey and Aunt Kate as they adjust to life without their partners.

If you follow my blog, [www.dotzourfamily.com](http://www.dotzourfamily.com), you can read up on the weekly highs and lows of our crew and see way more pictures than anyone really needs.

Here's a snapshot of our year.

In 2010, Bryan took up Ultimate Frisbee, grew a beard, and switched jobs. How's that for the year in a nutshell? He enjoys his new job programming at ShopBop, and it's a thrill to see him challenged and engaged. If you need any super-hip, trendy clothes, check them out online! Bryan's such a dedicated, capable guy, and I'm proud that he's my husband!

Andrew turned five in June. He spent the summer playing, climbing, reading, swimming, and generally living it up. He continues to love animals, has a fantastic imagination, loves to play on the iPhone, and is reading up a storm. In September, he started Kindergarten at our neighborhood Spanish language immersion charter school. I wasn't sure how he would do in a 90 % Spanish environment, but he's thriving. His teacher is fantastic, and he skips to and from school each day. What a joy!

Sylvia has grown up so much this year. She's a big talker now, telling stories, playing make-believe, and dancing, twirling, dressing up, and just being a wonder of a child. You should see that girl walk around in heels! We've had challenges helping her direct her intense emotions, but with the assistance of Paci and Poodle, and her increasing vocabulary, it seems like that is getting better all the time. If you ever want to play pretend, come on over to the Dotzour house, and my kids will engage you!

I've felt so fortunate this last year to live the life I do. I love living in Madison, and I feel lucky to get to be home with the kids. I feel luckier still to have some part-time child care for Sylvia which allows me the space to work at and grow my photography business – over 50 clients this year! I took up early-morning bootcamp workouts and took to running again. Remarkably, I'm really enjoying both! I had a busy year, and it was so much fun.

Especially at this celebratory time of year, our thoughts are with all our friends and family who we love but don't get to see. I hope your 2011 is a good year, filled with a lovely mix of calm and adventure, growth and peace. Cheers to you!

Althea

### **Cookies galore (2010-12-29 07:08)**

The kids and I got into the cookie-making spirit this year. I started right after Thanksgiving, making up the basic dough for our sugar cookies and Linzer squares. It's the best dang sugar cookie dough I know. It's made with almond paste. And to me, it just tastes like Christmas.





Since I love all my readers, I will share with you this dough recipe. It comes from my mom - Margot Babler - from a November 1980 Family Circle magazine article. And it's been made yearly in the Babler/Dotzour households for the last 30 years.

#### Basic Sugar Cookie Dough

##### Ingredients

1 lb butter softened (4 sticks)  
2 cup sugar  
2 cans almond paste (8 oz each)  
4 eggs  
1 1/2 tsp vanilla  
6 1/2-ish cup flour (sifted)  
1 1/4 tsp salt

##### Directions

Beat the butter and sugar. Crumble in almond paste. Beat until very smooth. Add the eggs and vanilla. Mix in the flour and salt. Break into four balls. Cover in plastic wrap and refrigerate or freeze.

For cut out cookies: Refrigerate dough for at least one hour. Roll out, cut out, chilling intermittently if necessary. Two balls of dough make enough cut-outs for our family.

Bake for 10-12 minutes at 375 degrees (air bake cookie sheets work great). I look for one tip of a cookie on a corner of the sheet to get the tiniest bit golden before pulling them out. Cool (or freeze). Frost with a mix of whipping cream and powdered sugar with a dab of vanilla.

For Linzer Squares: Use a jelly roll pan. Grease the pan, put down wax paper, grease the wax paper. Take one ball of the dough and press into the pan. Spread about one cup of raspberry jam (with seeds) over the dough. Take another 1/4 of the dough and roll out. Make strips with a pastry wheel. Lay the strips down to create a lattice weave pattern (but you don't actually have to weave them!). Bake at 375 for 12-15 minutes. Makes a great holiday

treat for teachers!



I spread out my cookie-making by making the dough early and freezing it, then cutting out the cookies and freezing those, and then frosting the cookies a few weeks later.



We were happy to have one of Andrew's best buddies from school join us.



Happy decorators!



Oops! I just noticed that last year I did a similar post about this recipe. I had pictures of the Linzer squares on that one. Oh well. The holidays come every year:)

### **Month of ill health (2010-12-30 07:42)**

One of the reasons that I didn't post much in December is that we were all so sick for so much of it.

Sylvia had a bad cold just after Halloween. She coughed for two weeks, had a good week of clear health, and then just after Thanksgiving came down with another cold. Soon, Bryan, Andrew, and I all were sick too. That's all normal enough, but a couple weeks later, she started running a fever again. The fever went away and was replaced by an evening of the stomach flu. At a birthday party no less. A doctor's appointment revealed an ear infection.

Then in addition to my cold, I got the worst sore throat I'd had in years. And I lost all energy - exhaustion and fatigue were the name of the game. A wonderful doctor - my fairy-god-doctor - diagnosed me with strep throat. After a couple days of antibiotics, my throat felt soooo much better. But it took me a good week to regain my ability to be up and about. So glad to live in an age of modern medicine!

Around that time, Andrew's cough got worse, so I took him to the doctor to have them check his lungs. I was glad that he wasn't having bronchitis or pneumonia issues, but they did put him on antibiotics to treat what they thought was a sinus infection.

So for the next 10 days, Andrew, Sylvia, and I were on a ridiculous medicine schedule. Sylvia took her medicine once a day. Andrew took his (refrigerated med) twice a day with food. I took mine three times a day - one hour before or two hours after eating. We all had a sticker chart to keep track of who had taken what.

Now, a month after we all initially got sick, I think it's safe to say that we're all on the mend. The kids and I



are still coughing intensely now and then, but we're close to normal. I'm back to giving 100 % at my workouts. And I'm hoping that we all get a little reprieve before we get the next bug that is inevitably on the way.

### **Christmas Eve (2010-12-31 07:09)**

We had a lovely Christmas celebration in Wisconsin this year. The last time we were in Madison for Christmas was in '08. My mom had been gone just over a year, and it was hard...coming up with new traditions without her.

This year felt a lot more joyous. Time really does heal.

I was so excited to see Mareta & Kyle and Joe. The Zilics drove down from St. Paul on the 23rd after work, and Joe flew in from DC on the 24th. By the afternoon of Christmas Eve, the four of us siblings were in the same place for the first time since May. Makes my heart feel full.

Here's some pics from our evening together.

Here, Mareta and Kyle are watching The Muppet's Christmas Carol with the kids.



Getting ready for supper.

Here's our menu:



## Christmas Eve Dinner 2010

Party potatoes - Lisa  
Roasted Brussel Sprouts  
Broccoli  
Rolls  
Pink Salad  
Slow cooked honey baked ham

Cheesecake - Mareta  
Lots and lots of Christmas cookies



Sitting down to the feast. I think everyone agreed that ham was a good way to go. So yummy!



Joe took a turn with the camera, so there's a picture of me!



There were 11 of us snugged in to our table. It worked out just fine:)



One ham is honey baked and one ham is a two-year-old girl.



Sweet sister.







Digging in!



After dinner, the kids got to open a few gifts. They opened their presents from Maretta & Kyle since the two of them were spending Christmas Day with Kyle's mom and Kyle's dad's family.





They also both got to open their Christmas pajamas.



After the kids were outfitted in their new jams, we all read *The Night Before Christmas* together.



My version of the story is illustrated by Mary Engelbreit, and I love the pictures.



Sylvia loved the story too.





The kids hung their stockings amidst much anticipation and headed off to the land of sugar plums. Here's a sneak peek of what they found the next morning.



Christmas is so much fun! And this was certainly a Christmas I'll remember. When people asked what he wanted for Christmas, Andrew stubbornly would reply, "Love. Just love in my heart." I think we all won out as there was lots of love in our hearts.



And with that, I lay my head down for a long winter's nap.



# 7. 2011

## 7.1 January

### Happy New Year's Day! (2011-01-01 21:20)

Bryan and I are just sitting down to watch an episode of my newest favorite TV show: Big Love. We had a good first day of 2011. But thank heavens that the kids are in bed. They were pretty wild and crazy today!

I took down all the Christmas decorations yesterday, so the house is back to a cleaner, fresh state. But I do miss that beautiful tree. On New Year's Eve, Joe and my dad came over for a while. We played some games, made some cookies, cut out some snowflakes, and enjoyed being together.

Joe's back in DC now, and the holidays are coming to a close. We've got one more day of winter break before our new year officially gets underway.

I hope your New Year celebration was a good one, and I hope your 2011 gets off to a great start.

Hugs,

Althea













**And then it was Christmas morn (2011-01-02 07:43)**

Andrew and Sylvia have been excited in the past. They get really happy about taking trips to Texas or going to a swimming pool or getting to go out for ice cream. But until now, I don't think I've seen the two of them as worked up as they were about Christmas. Sylvia understood what was happening a lot more than she did last year (when she was still just one), and she rode on the coat tails of Andrew's anticipation. We were at fever pitch here in the Dotzour house:)

So I was quite surprised when I woke up at 6:45am on Christmas morning and the kids were both still sleeping. A half hour later, and I got tired of lying in bed and went to get my phone so I could have something to do while I waited for the chillens to stir. It wasn't until about 7:40 that they woke up, and then, oh joy! Santa filled their stockings!





The kids had different approaches to opening their gifts this year. Andrew was on a mission to find and open his, and he did so in relatively rapid fashion. Sylvia, on the other hand, would open a gift, un-package it, and play with it for quite some time before showing any interest in what else was in store.

Here, she's playing with the wooden cupcakes that Bryan got for her. They're a big hit, and we've been doing lots of singing and blowing out of candles these last days.



Thanks to technology, we were able to share our Christmas morning with Bryan's parents and sister via Skype.

We all so enjoy spending Christmas with our wonderful family-in-Texas, and it felt really nice to get to share some time online. That way, too, they could see the kids open their gifts. Wish we could step through the screen and just join each other for a few hours!



Joe, whose head I cut off in this picture, spent the night with us and got to watch the kids enjoy Christmas morning.



There's Bryan laughing with his fam.



Andrew set right to work on a currency workbook I got him. He's fascinated by money money money these days.



I made a pulla wreath for our breakfast. Boy, was it yummy! I think we ate around 9:30, so the kids did well to work on their gift opening for a couple hours:)





Sweet, egg-y bread with an almond and raspberry filling.



Here's my favorite gift - Bryan's mom cut out silhouettes of Andrew and Sylvia. They're now hanging on my wall, where they will probably be displayed all my life. So beautiful and special. Thank you!!!





Sylvia's gifts - the tea sets have been a huge hit. I've been served so much coffee and tea and hot chocolate, it's amazing.



I am in love with this fairy doll house. Seriously! It's so cute. More photos to come in a future post.



Little red chairs from Maretta and Kyle. And the rocking horse was Maretta and Joe's and has now moved into our house. When asked what she wanted for Christmas (only starting a few days before Christmas, of course), Sylvia said "I want a horsie who rocks and who I can sit on." Good thing we had one waiting in the wings!



Andrew got a cool, wooden marble run. Adult assistance is required. It's going to be a really fun toy!





Setting it up.



The boys spent a couple hours playing with marbles!



After lunchtime, it was time to head over to my dad's for our Christmas Day festivities there. The party con-



tinues:)

### Christmas Day at Dad's (2011-01-03 07:45)

On Christmas Day, we headed over to Dad's house early afternoon and met up with Michael & Lisa, Joe, Tom, and at supper time, Heather, Michael & Evelyn. We watched movies, played games, and generally enjoyed spending some time together.

Here are the boys playing a game of Quirkle, a really fun pattern game that Melanie gave us for Christmas.



It's a little like Scrabble but (thank heavens) without the word part. The lines have to have either all the same colors but different shapes or all the same shape but different colors. Six in a row is a Quirkle and gets you big points.



While others played or talked or interacted with each other, Andrew played the iPad. I think he stared at Angry Birds for about six hours. And it was like his best day EVER.



I love the cute fuzzy polar bear shirt he's wearing. It's a gift from Granny & Grandad.



We enjoyed a fondue feast. First course was a broth fondue for cooking meats. Then we had a cheese course with veggies and breads for dipping. Rounding it off, we had a chocolate fondue (Nutella and cream) with cake, fruit, and (oh the incredible amazing goodness) mini-cream puffs. I think I had a transcendental experience while eating a cold mini-cream puff that had just been dipped in Nutella fondue.





There you have it! As we drove home from Dad's at 9pm, I felt waves of exhaustion wash over me. I spent so much time and energy anticipating Christmas this year. And it was wonderful. And as it came to a close, I felt spent and very full and a little raw. Like "put me to bed for the next five days." However, Maretta and Kyle were in town through Sunday, so after a quiet morning on the 26th, I rallied to go shopping with my sweet sister. A new purse for her and a new dress for me was rejuvenating:) That evening, I enjoyed meeting Maretta & Kyle, Joe, and some of Michael & Lisa's friends at the Great Dane for dinner. So much celebrating!!

Joe was in town through Dec 31, so I really enjoyed seeing him a couple days last week. And Heather, Michael, & Evelyn were also in town, and it was great to get to hang out with them two different days. Evie is about the cutest kid ever. Her eyes are so big and thoughtful and inquisitive. She and Sylvie did a pretty good job together...playing



with all the new toys. And I enjoying getting to catch up with my dear friends. I can't believe I didn't take any pictures of them together. I guess I was more concerned with playing interference (diving to stop Sylvie from throwing a toy) or with not interfering when things were magically working well.

Happy Christmas everyone!

### **Skinny kitty - sick kitty? (2011-01-04 07:09)**

Our sweet cat Bowser has gotten to be skinny recently. I've been able to feel his spine really distinctly recently, and when I took him in to the vet last week, I was sad to hear that he is down to 8lbs (he's been up around 14 lbs in the past...that's 40 % down).



So \$350 of vet tests later, we know the following. Bowser is not:

- hypertensive

- diabetic
- in kidney failure

Also, he does not:

- have glomerular disease (something to do with protein in the urine)
- have a thyroid abnormality

And they found that his blood counts are normal.



Possible Diagnosis:

During his physical exam, Dr. Heidi found that Bowser's intestines felt thickened, and based on the fact that all other the other tests came back normal, she thinks he has some kind of a small intestinal disease. She says that the most likely candidates are inflammatory bowel disease, eosinophilic enteritis, lymphangectasia, diffuse small cell lymphoma, or another type for cancer.

Prognosis:

From Dr. Heidi's email:

Inflammatory bowel disease has a good prognosis. Treatment involves feeding a hypoallergenic diet and oral medications to decrease the inflammation. Most cats are treated with weekly injections of

vitamin B12 also. Eosinophilic enteritis is a subset of inflammatory bowel disease and treated similarly. Lymphangectasia is not common in cats and can be more challenging to treat.

Diffuse small cell lymphoma is common. In a recent study performed at the UW, there was a 96 % response rate to oral medications (prednisolone and chlorambucil) and a median remission of 2 ¼ years.

Doing a blood test of his GI system in order to move toward confirming the diagnosis is over \$200.



I think I might try switching B to a hypoallergenic diet for a month to see if that helps before moving forward with more testing. It's always kinda hard to know how to proceed with these kind of situations.

A couple years ago, Bowser's brother Spooky had lost a significant amount of weight. I took him in, and we did a whole slew of tests and an ultrasound. They showed that he had probable bladder cancer, but we didn't do the tests to confirm. Now, two years later, Spook is still fine, and he's back to a healthy weight. So maybe he did/does have bladder cancer, or maybe he had something else that cleared up on its own. Sometimes, I think the answer is: who knows!

I am happy that my affectionate black kitty is in good health two years from his very worrisome diagnosis.



Please wish my Bowser-kitty good health! He's my sleeping buddy, and most every night for the last 10 years, I've fallen asleep while he kneads my scalp, drapes his body across my head, and/or rests his little wubbily chin on my cheek or ear and purrs away.





**Sylvia's tree trunk fairy house (2011-01-05 07:25)**

One of my favorite Christmas gifts this year is a wooden tree trunk doll house Sylvia got. There's been a lot of fairy play. Andrew's Schleich animals come to visit too. The velociraptor insists that he's come to be friendly.



This bridge and little wooden river are just too much!





Sylvia really enjoys it.



And these fairy dolls. So cute!









Thanks for looking!  
1810



**Winter home tour (2011-01-06 07:41)**

Our home is de-Christmas-ized, and we're on to winter. I wandered around the house snapping some pictures of the winter decorations and just of our somewhat disheveled home at the start of 2011.

This candle is a little Christmas gift I got for myself:) The white fairy was Sylvia's until she had a fit and knocked it's head repeatedly until it fell off. Now its mine:)



This little chickadee decoration is from my grandma. I like it:)



Here's our de-Christmas-tree'd living room.



I've been thinking that I'd like to have lights up somehow again. Maybe hanging them around the ceiling like in college. I just miss the sweet glow of our Christmas tree!



Bryan got me this collage for Christmas a few years ago. Last month I filled it with pictures from Christmases past.





Kirstin, my American Girl, is dressed in her nightgown for winter.



My mom made this cross-stitch, and it was hanging at my grandma's house. Last fall, my uncle Kirk and I found it in Mum's storage locker. So happy to have it in my house. It makes me happy.



Here's Sylvia's room.





And our room.



And Andrew's room.



Our kitchen.





And sunroom.







The kitchen sink with snowflakes in the window.



Hope you enjoyed the tour:)

**Winter tree (2011-01-07 07:34)**

While I enjoy having the house all fresh and open post-Christmas, I found myself really missing the Christmas tree. Plus, our living room has been feeling really dark. So on January 2, I made a run to Ace where I picked up some white lights, a 5-gallon paint bucket, and a couple bags of sand. Then I went in the back yard and cut a couple branches out of April's dogwood bush. I brought it inside, spent an hour winding lights, and voilà!





I've been thinking about bringing branches in the house for quite some time, and this seems like the perfect time and way to do it. Our Christmas tree skirt is doubling as a winter tree skirt. Maybe I'll have the kids make some birds to hang from the branches:)

Merry January to you! I'll close with a couple pics of the kids watching The Princess Bride. It's an instant favorite.



## Swimming (2011-01-08 07:11)

On our last day of winter vacation (Sunday the 2nd), Bryan and I took the kids swimming at Swim West. We've been cooped up inside because of first wet and then cold weather, so the kids haven't had a lot of large motor exercise but have still been eating all the Christmas and New Year's cookies as well as Lisa's delicious birthday cake. It was soooo great to get to spend some time in a warm pool. The kids swam for a couple hours, we went to Culver's for a special treat lunch, and then they both fell asleep.

For those of you in Madison, I recommend Swim West's open swim. I took Andrew and Sylvia last spring every Friday from 9-12 - it was only \$5 for the three of us. It's the time of year when getting into a warm pool can make us feel like warmth and summer will one day return. A good reminder as we head into the long winter months!



## Podcasts that rock (2011-01-09 07:31)

x

I am a little addicted to listening to podcasts. Something to do with my compulsive personality. First, I fell in love with This American Life and This I Believe (see my Oct. '09 post here). Then in the last year, I've added Planet Money, Savage Love, and Radiolab to that list of podcast.

You've got to check them out. I know I do whenever I have a moment in the car or in the kitchen by myself!

I get ridiculously excited when I get to listen to Planet Money. Yay for engaging, funny, intelligent news that helps me better understand the world!

Radiolab is a little like This American Life in that they pick a theme and explore that theme through a variety of stories. I'm going backwards in time, and am now listening to podcasts from 2009.

They did an hour-long show on "death," and then they did a set of short shows to follow-up on that theme. In one of them, Robert Krulwich reads an excerpt from poet and writer, Mark Doty's 1996 memoir Heaven's Coast (listen here). I liked this one so much that I listened to it a few times. And then I felt like I should share it with someone, but I wasn't sure who. So my solution was to write a post about it. If you don't listen to the whole 3 minute story, here's an excerpt of my favorite part that I wanted to share. In this story, Mark is witnessing his partner, Wally, during the last moments of Wally's life. I think I'll have to check out more of Mark Doty's writing.

Thanks for reading. I found that like poetry it is best savored when read aloud.

The afternoon is so quiet and deep, it seems almost to ring and chime, a cold, struck bell. There is an inaudible roaring, a rush, beneath the surface of things, beneath the surface of Wally, who is now almost no surface, as if I could see into him, into that great hurrying current, that energy, that forward motion which is life going on. I was never this close to anyone in my life. His living so deep, and absolute, that it pulls me close to that interior current, so far inside his life, and my own. I know I am going to be more afraid than I have ever been, but right now I am not afraid. I am face to face with the deepest movement in the world, the point of my love's deepest reality, where he is most himself, even if that self empties out, into no one, swift river hurrying into the tumble of rivers, out of individuality, into the great rushing whirlwind of currents. God, moving on the face of the waters....

## Ballerina Girl (2011-01-10 06:41)

My little girl starts her first ballet class today. She'll be taking 1/2 hour classes at the YMCA on Mondays through February. Last week, she and I went shopping for her dance gear together. It really is fun to have a little partner to run errands with. She is such a fun little person, and my days are colorful and interesting because she is a part of them:)

She picked out the leotard instantly. "The one with the black bow!" Then when we went to Payless for the shoes, she tried them on and traipsed and sashayed all around the store. Here's a few pictures of my very excited ballerina girl.

These toes. I just can't get enough of this tip-toeing beslippered toes.



Can you tell she's excited? She is.



She was ready to get in the car and go to class right now. The idea of "next week" doesn't really register as much for her two-year-old self.



She was demonstrating various spins and jumps for me.





Agh! Again with the the toes!



This girl makes my heart go pitter pat. With her lopsided haircut and her new ballerina headband. Just look at the way her sweet hands are curls together. Excitement. Self-consciousness. Anticipation. Tender, hopeful heart.



When I asked for a smile (something I don't tend to do!), here's what I got. oh, she's so grown up, it kinda stabs my heart a little. But I couldn't be happier with who she is and who she's becoming. It's an exciting adventure, raising children and witnessing their maturation. What beautiful little people they are.



I hope her first foray into the land of ballet classes is all that my little one wishes it to be. Cheers to you, little ballerina girl!

#### **First taste of dance class (2011-01-11 07:49)**

Sylvia was so beautifully excited and full of happy anticipation about her first ballet class. We got her geared-up with her leotard and slippers last week, and since then she's been counting down the days. We're taking her class at the NE YMCA. Here's some cute pictures of her and Celia (and Ceila's cousin Nida) as they were getting ready.

Think Sylv is excited?



Just look at Celia's beautiful lashes and lips. <sigh>



Getting her skirt pinned in the back.





Nida (Celia's cousin) is a bit too young for ballet, but she very much was interested in the action.



Sylv tiptoes her way into the studio.



Celia skips in past her instructor.



The kids were on their own with the instructor in the studio, so I peeked in a narrow window to catch some images of our girls as they experienced their first class.



<aaak> They're holding hands!





This may be my favorite picture ever. The sweetness is almost too much to bear.



Little girls practicing their stretches.



Little girls practicing first pliés (which, I have just now learned how to spell).



Oh! First position!



And then class was done. The girls skipped out and excitedly received stickers.



Second favorite photo of the day. Toddler legs, swirly skirts, and ballet slippers...too much!



I think Celia had fun!



Post-lesson, the girls spent a while singing and dancing together to spend some of their excess dancing happiness.





:)



Ring around the Rosie...



So cute!



Weee hoooo! These girls are pretty happy!

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Sounds like the parents get to come in to watch during the final class (on February 21st). I think I'll have to take some video that day!

Hope this gave you a smile!

### **Acknowledgments (2011-01-12 11:06)**

When I crack open a new book, the first thing I do is read the dedication and find the acknowledgments page. Before starting to read, I want to learn a little about who the author is, and for me, the acknowledgments give me a little view into who they are, what's important to them, and how eloquent their book might be. I particularly like to see how and where they thank their spouse and children. Genuine, heartfelt thanks earns the writer lots of points in my book

I just started a book, and here's how the writer thanks his wife:

Kelly, you are my soul mate, lover, and best friend. Through thick and thin you have helped me become who I was intended to be.

<sigh> Acknowledgments that leave me choked up are the best ones of all.

I think I should start a running list of excellent acknowledgments. Do you have any favorites?



### **Cookbook project (2011-01-13 07:08)**

I just re-started work on a cookbook of my mom's recipes.

Back in fall 2007, back when I was pregnant and working and my mom had just passed away, I took steps toward making a cookbook of her recipes to share with family and friends. I started in early September with the goal of finishing by Thanksgiving. And I did get about 40 recipes entered on the computer. But then I was unhappy with how the software I was using made the recipes look. And I wanted to add photos or scanned copies of the recipes in my mom's handwriting. And I ran out of steam.

However, if you're interested, here's a link to version 1.0 of my mom's recipe cookbook.

<Then, three years go by. I stopped working, had a baby, started my photography business, and stayed busy-busy!>



Last weekend, spurred by the freshness of the new year, I spent a couple evenings going through my own recipe piles. I have a loose-leaf binder full of sheet protectors that contain recipe clippings from the last 10+ years. On top of that binder sat about 5 inches of paper that was supposed to be in the binder. I went through the binder and culled recipes and then added most of the unwieldy stack of printed recipes, recipes from friends, and all the recipes I've pulled from magazines.

Then I started thinking that it would be a great idea to get all that info out of a binder and on to my computer. Most of the recipes I make these days are from blogs or are from online recipe databases (like EverydayFood.com). So I got on the new Mac AppStore and saw that there are some cool Mac-based recipe software.

I compared software called YummySoup and another called MacGourmet. I like that MacGourmet can make printed books. And that made me think about the book I was going to make of Mom's recipes. After downloading the software and pulling out Mom's pile of dusty recipes, I got really excited about creating a nice cookbook of my mom's recipes.

So here's my plan: I'll have this cookbook ready and available as a pdf to download or a book to purchase by Mom's birthday: April 7. I plan to include scanned copies of Mom's hand-written notes, some of Mom's cartoon clippings, notes from us kids, and poems that were in her recipe box.

I'll need some help, and here's how:

1. I plan to post some early iterations of the cookbook, and I'll need reviewers. Let me know if you want to help, drop me a note ([adotzour@gmail.com](mailto:adotzour@gmail.com)).
2. Back in 2007, several people sent me notes about their favorite recipes that Mom made and stories about times shared around food. If you haven't sent me such notes and would like to, I'd love to include more in this book!
3. I've got lots of recipes that are either in version 1.0 or are going to be added in this version, but please let me know if you have favorites that you'd like to see included.



OK, that's my thoughts and my plan and my needs. Hold me accountable! I'm excited to complete this project:)

Althea

### **Cold Snap's birthday (2011-01-14 10:11)**

Did you know that I used to have horses? From 1993-2002, I had one or two horses. When I was in middle school, a friend won a horse by putting her name in a drawing at a mall hair salon (amazing huh?). I spent a couple years visiting the barn with my friends, and eventually I started taking lessons. Then in 1993, when I was a junior in high school, the woman from whom I was taking lessons was moving out of state and was looking to quickly sell her horses. And so it came to pass that I ended up with my very own horse - Valentine.



It wasn't until about 9 months later that we learned that when we bought Valentine, we actually got a "twofer" - she

was pregnant! So, in January, 1994, I had two horses! Cold Snap, Valentine's foal was born on the night of January 14, 1994. As his name suggests, the weather was chilly. In fact, it was a bitterly cold couple of weeks, with temperature around -20 degrees and the wind chill plummeting to something like -60. Not a great time to be born in a barn.



We wrapped Val's stall in thick plastic to try to keep the drafts out and had a couple space heaters going. I spent hours and hours at the barn that week, and at least one night, I stayed overnight with my mom and another friend. It was so cold that even wearing my super-warm barn boots, I couldn't feel my feet. One time, Val stepped near me and I heard a "crack." I wasn't sure if she had stepped on my foot or not and ran off to take off my boot to check my foot for injury since it was totally numb (my foot was fine).

It turned out that Val wanted privacy for her birth. No one was in the barn when Cold Snap made his entrance. I remember my mom calling up the stairs to me when the barn-owners telephoned us on the morning of the 15th to tell us that he'd arrived.

Oh, he was so cute! We had him wearing a big sweatshirt and/or a flannel shirt for the first week until he put on a little insulating weight. What a silly guy:)



When I graduated from high school, I took both my horses in a trailer up to Carleton College (in Minnesota) with me, and they made the trip up and back many-a-time. During my junior year of college, I sold Val - spending enough time with the horses had become more and more challenging.



I have such fond memories of my hours in the barn. The smells, the touch of a horse's sweet nose (I'd often come home with a very dirty face from kissing all those grubby equines). Good times with friends. Meditation.

I hope to have my own farm some day. Someday, some day.

There are seasons in life for many activities. My teen years were so much richer for the hours I spent at the barn in the company of horses. I hope that a future time in my life includes a similar season, full of sweet-smelling hay and grain, leather saddles, dirty jeans, and horsey kisses.



I have a poem about horses on my refrigerator, yellowed and curling with age. Mom sometimes cut out poems or cartoons from the newspaper. This is the last one I have from her, and I've been a little loathe to take it down. Maybe if I share it here, it'll feel OK to move it along.

#### Kissing a Horse by Robert Wrigley

Of the two spoiled, barn-sour geldings  
we owned that year, it was Red -  
skittish and prone to explode  
even at fourteen years - who'd let me  
hold to my face his own: the massive labyrinthine  
caverns of the nostrils, the broad plain  
up the head to the eyes. He'd let me stroke  
his coarse chin whiskers and take  
his soft meaty underlip  
in my hands, press my man's carnivorous  
kiss to his grass-nipping upper half of one, just  
so that I could smell  
the long way his breath had come from the rain  
and the sun, the lungs and the heart,  
from a world that meant no harm.

Ahh, good stuff. Cold Snap is 17 years old now. A middle-aged man. I wonder if he's still as fast and furious and fun to ride? Perhaps he's still at Hell Creek Ranch in Michigan...riding the trails and living the good life. Happy birthday, buddy!



Here's some pictures when he was less than a year...





And here's him all grown up... He's a horse of a different color!





### **Classic Cold Snap story (2011-01-15 08:12)**

Yesterday, I wrote a post about my horse Cold Snap. It got me thinking about memorable incident that happened out at the barn in 1996 when I was a sophomore at college. I remember writing up the story and sending it to my family, but I can't find that cleaned-up version. Instead, here's a copy of a note I sent to my friend Anne describing that exciting day.





saturday is my day of fun and excitement...

I woke up at 9 and went right out to the horse. This is the FIRST time i have gotten out there is two weeks. I needed to see them so much. It was great. I drove out there and it was nice to get a chance to just drive and look at the drying cornfields and the sun and blue sky and other people doing non-college activities:>

Oh, Annie, I saw a tree that was so pretty I thought of you. It was mostly green but the top layer of leaves was turning orange it looked like a burnished orange crown or perhaps more like a fairy had come by and sprinkled magic redish orange pixy dust all over the top. So pretty in the sunlight:)

So when I got out to the horse, I got their halters and walked out into the pasture and they both ran over, and I pet them and talked to them and tried to figure out who to take out first.

I figured that since \_I \_ hadn't had horse experience in a couple weeks I should start out with Valentine. So I took her out and put her in the upper barn where I brushed her off. Meanwhile, I hear Cold Snap starting to run back and forth along the pasture outside of the barn. He sounded really upset. I went out and talked to him for a few moments and told him I would take him out in a little bit. I asked him to calm down. Well, he didn't, and this is what happened.

The Interesting Story:



I was in the barn brushing off Val, and Cold Snap starts really making like an insane horse, running frantically across the whole pasture. He was REALLY upset and running like Secretariat...dirt flying up behind of him. Actually, it was kind of cute. My baby had missed me and didn't want me to be working with Val. Hey, I was liked. Hey, what was he doing? What is that noise? ohmygod! He was crashing through the fence! He was breaking the boards in half! He was down in the mud! He was up and leaping through the broken fence! I ran from Val. (thank goodness she ground ties well...), and by the time I got to the garage, Cold Snap was coming around the corner to find me. Snorting, pawing, "I'm out, Mom, I came to find you, Mom." "Everything is good, Mom." "I didn't know I was that strong Mom."

Good gracious, you stupid, stupid horse!! So I got a halter on him and put him and Val in stalls in the barn. (Oh he was fine if he was with Val) then I went out to survey the damage and prevent the other horses in the pasture from getting loose! Yes sirree. My well-behaved little baby broke straight through three boards. broke. sigh. well one of the other horses was standing at the break..eating some grain on the other side of these broken boards. He was like "hmmm. this is kind of neat. look, I can \_eat \_ this grain by just sticking by head through this nice absence of fence." So I put the other horses in a different paddock and left Barbara a long note explaining what had happened.

Ahhh, memories! I do enjoy that story. And it's sure to make my brother laugh really big:)

Unrelated but silly pictures of me and Val:



Oops. This looks like I've got it all backward.



Now I'm facing the right way!

### **Singing your song (2011-01-20 07:21)**

I just got home from my morning bootcamp workout, and I had to write a post to tell you about a new song I love. I listened to it while I drove to and from my workout today. Both times, it made me cry. In fact, on the drive home, I had tears kinda dripping down my face.

Here are the lyrics to When the Night Came Around. I just know you'll be moved. :)

There was a cow.  
She made a sound.  
The prettiest song that you ever did hear.  
And when the night  
came around

she sang a song for her friends to hear.

The cow went moo moo moo

The cow went moo moo moo

The cow went moo.

It repeats with a sheep going baa and a horse going neigh. Then it ends like this.

So when the farmer went down to bed  
and no one was around  
they met under a star-lit tree  
and made music through the night.

And they sang <moo/baa/neigh>  
and they sang  
and they sang.

And they made the prettiest sound  
when the night came around.

This song is from Melissa Green's album *round and round* (you can hear it if you follow that link). I find myself laughing at the fact that a song about moo-ing, baa-ing, and neighing makes me cry. It's Melissa's beautiful singing and guitar that gives this song such soul. Listening to it, I find myself thinking about pure and beautiful things in the world. This story about some farm animals singing their songs to each other just kinda breaks my heart with its simplicity.

It reminds me of one of my favorite children's books *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart and David Small. In this book, set during the depression, a young garden-loving country girl is sent to live in the city with a gruff uncle. The story is told through the letters she sends home to her family. As the girl plans a big, flowery surprise for her uncle, she writes home that, "I've tried to remember everything you taught me about beauty." My voice cracks every time I read that part to the kids. So simple. Just a little girl doing her best to make it in the world. Her soul is that of a gardener, and she's grown up feeling loved, and she wants to share it.

In so many small ways, we teach our children about beauty. From the way we touch and treat each other to the art we make. Makes me think of another favorite song, *Simple Gifts*:

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gain'd,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,

To turn, turn will be our delight,

Till by turning, turning we come round right.

When I go to Andrew's elementary school and see all those sweet little kids, find my heart filling with hope that each of them will trust his or her song. That they'll know that their song is the prettiest song that you ever did hear. And that all their lives they'll all find ways to sing to their friends under a star-lit tree and make music through the night.

### **What is it to live (2011-01-21 07:24)**

As I wrote yesterday's post, I remembered an oft-told story my mom liked from my childhood.

It was a hot August afternoon in the country. The sun was setting, and the light glowed with a special warm light. I was about three, riding in the car, just me and my mom with the windows rolled down. As the wind blew through the car, we inhaled deeply, breathing in the smell of growing corn, of earth and green and summer and evening.

I turned to my mom and said, "I feel so happy."

When she told this story, my mom would stop here, and say that in that moment, she realized that her little girl had really and truly experienced life. She'd say, "I knew then that if you were to die the next day that (as horrible as it sounds) in a way it would be OK because you knew in your very own soul what beauty was."

I like that story because it reminds me deep in my gut how much my mom loved me. And it reminds me how much I gained from her - how much of my appreciation of beauty and of life I gleaned from her...just because I'm her daughter.

The song that I wrote about yesterday - When the Night Came Around - made me think of that August car ride because after hearing the song for the first time, Andrew said, "Wow. Mom, I really like that song. It makes me feel so happy."

I love raising my children for many, many reasons. The snuggles and little sleeping bodies are high on my list. But one subtle reason I love having children is that I feel like there is such a continuity between me and my mom and then between my kids and me. I love tending to their developing aesthetic by surrounding our lives with good music and entertainment, beautiful clothes and toy, wholesome food, imaginative play, outdoor exploration, lots of stories and activities and listening time.

And hopefully Andrew and Sylvia are developing a rounded sense of what it is to be alive.

I hope that my children and everyone I care for gets to live to old age where they can savor each season of life. But I don't necessarily feel like people are owed a long life. I hope to live my life and to teach my children to live their lives so that no matter how many days we have we suck the marrow out of each one.

That reminds me of my favorite scene from Dead Poet's Society

John Keating: [talking about people in old awards ceremony photographs] They're not that different from you, are they? Same haircuts. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is



their oyster. They believe they're destined for great things, just like many of you. Their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. [the students lean in] Listen, you hear it? [whispers in a raspy voice] Carpe — hear it? — Carpe, carpe diem, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary.

Mom loved that quote too:)

Here's the video clip for a little Robin Williams inspiration:



IFRAME: <http://www.youtube.com/embed/rVXKz0j9fvs?rel=0>

Forward to the 3 minute point if you'd like to get to the quoted section.

### **Skinny kitty even skinnier (2011-01-26 11:58)**

I took Bowser in to the vet this morning for a blood test. He's down to 7lbs, 4oz, which I think is about a pound less than he weighed a few weeks ago. Not good. Here's a link to the post I wrote on January 4 describing the tests we had done then. Bowser's been on a hypoallergenic diet for the last few weeks, and he's been on prednisone for the last week. He's ravenous beyond belief. He actually steals food from our hands and plates while we're eating. But no weight gaining. Oh, that reminds me that I was going to have them give Bowser a B12 injection while he was getting his blood draw. Oops. Forgot about that one.

My feline has decided that he does not like the hypoallergenic dry food I got him. He is, however, a huge fan of the soft food. So now I got him some rabbit and venison soft and dry food options to try. That and probiotics and fish oil (which, strangely, both cats think is disgusting) are all part of the current routine.



Because he is so skinny, because he's enamored with me because I give him soft food, or perhaps because he senses that he's sick, Bowser has been super-cuddly and affectionate. Before Andrew and Sylvia were around, he would sleep under the covers next to me. But it's been over five years since he burrowed under the blankets. However, these last weeks, he's been snuggling down under the covers with me all night. He either sleeps like a teddy bear in my arms or with his spine lined up against my spine. Or sometimes, since he has a thing for my hair, he'll have his rump under my arm and will stretch his body across my neck so he can knead at my hair next to my ear. It's all very furry and cozy and makes for excellent sleeping.



Spooky (Bowser's brother) has meanwhile been throwing up all the time. I think he's been eating the flowers off a cyclamen that I brought home. One day last week he threw up five times. And he picked really terrible places - the couch, the bed (comforter and sheets), a pillow left on the floor, the one carpeted room of our house. I've been putting the potted flower on top of the refrigerator at night to keep it away from him. Last night I forgot, and the dorky cat a) snipped off all the flowers b) ate one of them and c) vomited on me, the bed, and a pillow on the floor in the night. Excellent. I think I'm going to send the flower to work with Bryan. I will say that this constant cat-puking hasn't helped make the case for spending oodles more \$ \$ to diagnose Bowser:)

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Hopefully when we get the results back from this blood test (they said it would be a week), we'll have more to go on about what is troubling my cute black-and-white cat.

Thanks for your friendly thoughts:)

Althea

## 7.2 February

### Snow Day - Groundhog's Day 2011 (2011-02-02 16:36)

It's been a nice snow day here in the Dotzour home today. We got six inches of snow on Monday night and then a blizzard-y 12 inches last night. School was canceled, most offices are closed, and in general, it seems like the city is in snow day mode. Bryan is on call for work, and unfortunately, they had some super-major crises going on with the ShopBop website, so he worked intensely from home from the time he woke until about 3. Now he's in the quiet office...hopefully getting some work done. Such a conscientious and diligent worker he is:)

While Bryan was hard at work on the laptop in our bedroom, the kids and I engaged in all sorts of fun snow day activities.

Here's Sylvia preparing her favorite breakfast - English muffins with butter and honey.





Snug inside, we took a peek at the drifts of snow outside.



There's a bit of snow hanging over the edge of our roof!





I've been eying a Valentine's Day project involving shaved crayons, waxed paper, and an iron. This seemed like a good morning to give it a go. I started by using a pencil sharpener to shave down red and pink and purple and yellow crayons.



The crayon shavings are in the little cups. We took pieces of waxed paper and sprinkled the crayon shavings on half of the sheet.



Here are my two little heart-makers.



I folded the sheets in half, crimped the edges so no wax got out, and ironed the sheet to melt the wax. It's a beautiful, kinda magic transformation. Then I cut hearts out of the sheets.



And I strung the hearts on pieces of string or taped them to our windows.



After that project, I wanted to try something else, so the kids and I decided to make Maple Syrup Taffy. Thanks to Heather for suggesting this snowy activity!



I took around 1/2 cup of syrup and heated it...





...until it was between 235 and 245 degrees.



The kids had gotten bundled up and went outside to retrieve a bowl full of snow. When the syrup was the right temp, I poured it over the snow. After letting it cool for a few moments, I used my fingers to wind it into mushy balls. The kids got to eat the warm, gooey maple syrup candy. They thought it was delicious!





Afterward, we read the chapter from *Little House in the Big Woods* where Laura makes the same treat.

"Laura and all the other children scooped up clean snow with their plates. Then they went back into the crowded kitchen.

Grandma stood by the brass kettle and with the big wooden spoon she poured hot syrup on each plate of snow. It cooled into soft candy, and as fast as it cooled they ate it.

They could eat all they wanted, for maple sugar never hurt anybody. There was plenty of syrup in the kettle, and plenty of snow outdoors. As soon as they ate one plateful, they filled their plates with snow again, and Grandma poured more syrup on it."

## DANCE AT GRANDPA'S

...syrup they set out more. They set  
away, to cool into maple sugar.  
Grandma said:  
"Bring the patty-pans for the children."



Bryan had woken up really early and hand-shoveled the drive way. It was so nice of our neighbor Brett to come by and widen it out for us.



After coaxing my kids for hours, I got them to get dressed to play outside. Here's our snowy home.



Our tree swing is almost buried!



Happy snowy girl!



It's a good day for snow shoes. As the kids tried to walk through the snow, they sunk up to their hips!



Snow study...





We'd made pretzel dough before going outdoors, and after we came in, we rolled out the pretzels together. Dough was consumed.



Then there was hot coca and buttery pretzels straight from the oven. It's been a good snow day!



### **Winter weekend at Jack's (2011-02-03 07:54)**

Twice a year, my family packs up and heads out to Jack's house on the Wisconsin River. We're drawn like ants to honey.

Pictures from our weekend can be found [here](#) a sample can be seen below. Maretta brought her camera, so these photos are a mix of her pics and mine.

Here she and I are swapping lenses and taking pictures of each other...



Pretty Mer.



While Maretta and I were playing with cameras, Michael, Kyle, Bryan, and Matt were playing a board game. Something about Meeples.



Sylvia twirls like a ballerina. I packed her clothes for her, and on Saturday morning, I brought her an outfit. When she put it on, I was a little amazed to see her wearing a complete, coordinated outfit that I had picked out. I don't think that's happened in the last year. Then she put her pajama shirt over top of her clothes and all was well and normal in the world.



Sitting around...and playing with my new flash.





Oh my. It's a birthday cake from Rolling Pin Bake Shop. Sylvia had requested a cake with purple frosting. This strawberry shortcake cake was fantastic. Whipping cream frosting. Thanks to Michael for acquiring it!



Along with purple frosting, she requested candles. And wouldn't you know that I forget the cake candles. Fortunately, Jack pulled through with three candles. Sylvia's birthday isn't until February 11, but we celebrated at Jack's since Mareta and Kyle were there. And Tom, Dad, and Michael were all there too (Lisa wasn't feeling great and stayed home this time). Our girl was quite happy to be sung to!



Blowing out the candles. Thanks to Maretta for all these pics.



YUM! The kids dig in. I wasn't sure how Andrew would feel about Sylvia's birthday, but he was really excited and happy for her.



This was a thickly frosted cake. And Sylvia ate all the frosting and no cake:)



Maretta photographing.



Tom and Matt have lengthy discussions about big topics while Michael peruses his iPad.



Michael brought a bunch of card games for Andrew, and here he's making up rules to a dragon game.





Tom acts as my model while Matt holds my new external flash off to the left.



On Saturday, Bryan, Michael, and Andrew all spent a relaxing period in Jack's sauna. Andrew was delighted to be "one of the boys." He had to run out regularly to avoid over heating. I think his favorite part was when the three of them plunged into the snow with only their swim trunks on. Here's a foot print from my little boy. Funny to see bare footprints in the snow.





Here we've got Maretta knitting, Kyle reading and Michael and Matt playing a game together on their iPads. Our winter weekend at Jack's is cozy and quiet and relaxing.



Andrew and Bryan are playing Yatzee. Again.



And Jack is cleaning up the kitchen. Again. Because that's what Jack does. As he said, "You may have noticed that I'm not much into sitting around." True statement, Jack! Thanks for hosting us for a lovely weekend! Looking forward to our summer visit already.



### **Bonfires and snowmen (2011-02-04 07:32)**

When we were at Jack's last weekend, we spent a couple hours on Saturday up on Jack's prairie watching some brush piles burn, making snowmen and "sledding." I didn't bring my camera, so these photos are all courtesy of Maretta.

Here we are getting ready to leave.



There's Kyle ready for a winter adventure.



Bryan and Andrew heading out. That's the frozen Wisconsin River behind them.





Sylvia walked most of the way up the hill. Here she wanted a carry because her legs were "sore."



Winter still life.



There's my handsome brother-in-law!



Sylv and Bryan.



The snow was just perfect for snow balls and snow men. I had fun rolling up some big balls.



Kyle helps me stack the middle snow ball on the big snowman.



Packing it in.



Bryan pulled Sylvia around in this big tub. She loved it!





Andrew takes a lick from the snowman.



Kyle and I finish off snowman #1.



This might be the biggest one I've made!



After getting a hat and a face and some arm, this snowman gets a hug.



With snow this packable, a snowball fight was inevitable.





No tears were shed during this mayhem.



Bryan's amused.



Kyle and I went to work and made an Andrew snowman.



While we all goofed off, Jack lit about seven big stacks of dry wood (remnants from a pine stand that was removed a couple years ago). The rippling flames were beautiful. And toasty. Andrew tried to douse the flames of one by throwing snowballs at it continuously for a long time. He made a bit of a dent in the inferno, but not much.



Finally, we made a Sylvie snowman. Here, Kyle inserts the paci. It was holding Poodle too, but that was short lived as the real Sylvie wasn't OK sharing with the snowman.



The Sylvie snowman is wearing a bark crown.



Matt enjoying a winter day at Jack's.





Sylvia removes the paci from the snowman.



Here's our trio of snowpeople. They are watching the bon fires. Perhaps in extreme horror. We spent a while contemplating what the snowmen would do after we left. Lots of wild adventures were considered à la Snowmen at Night.



Andrew brings home a dried milkweed pod. A beautiful reminder of seasons past.



So that's it for photos from Jack's winter weekend 2011. Regular attendees who weren't there, we missed you!!

## First view of Tom's River Retreat (2011-02-05 07:36)

Our friend Tom has dreamed of owning a home by the Wisconsin River since he was a graduate student at the UW in the 1970s. A few years ago, he started looking for properties between Spring Green and Lone Rock. Then, last summer, he found a lovely piece of land just downstream of the Lone Rock bridge (that's the bridge on Hwy 14 that looks like it's going to run into a rock bluff :)

Tom started construction on his new home last fall. I hadn't been out to see it yet, so on our drive home from Jack's house, we made a visit. Here we're on the Lone Rock bridge heading east. That's the Wisconsin River below. Tom's property is in sight if you were to look left.



Just after crossing the bridge, we see a sign for Lone Rock. And when we take a left, we're on a dead-end street headed to his place.



And here it is! Tom's River Retreat and Water Palace a.k.a. Jack's Big Bluff East. There's Tom opening the door to show us in.



Lots of construction going on still. He's getting permits left and right, and he thinks it will be move-in ready by next week! This picture shows the living room, and an open bedroom up the stairs.



This is the whirlpool/soaker tub/sauna area. The big circular thing next to Bryan is the footprint for the whirlpool. The door to the sauna is on the left side of this room.



The sauna is complete. And just beautiful.





Looking out the doors from the water room. The area close to the house will be a patio area. Down by the trees, the Wisconsin River is mostly covered with ice. The Lone Rock bridge is off to the left.



There's our happy new home owner. Tom's been the contractor for all this building and construction, and it's kept him incredibly busy. We used to see him a couple times a week, but since they broke ground in September, we see him only occasionally.



Here's a table saw in one of the bedrooms. In addition to the main open bedroom in the living area, there are two guest rooms, each of which is planned to have a set of queen sized bunk beds for Babler/Haller/Dotzour/Zilic family gatherings.



Here I'm standing in the master bedroom looking down at the living room. The two guest rooms are directly across. The front door is hidden behind Tom. Bryan is across from the kitchen and the water room.



Here's the kitchen. The appliances are beautiful, and the view (down toward the river) is wonderful. It'll be fun to prepare some meals here!



The whirlpool/soaker tub/sauna is through the beautiful windows and French doors. Facing south, this bank of windows gets lots of lovely light.



Next, Tom took us outside to check out the basement.





Here Tom is opening up the doors to the basement. The patio area is just behind him.





There's the soaker tub. It's wood!



Here Tom is showing me his new furnace, water heater, etc. He put something like six inches of spray foam insulation in the walls.



Andrew's exploring.



So there you have it. Tom's River Retreat. He'll still be living in Madison in his condo. This new place seems like it will be an amazing addition to our weekend outdoor options. Lone Rock is about 70 minutes from our place. Good work, Tom!



A more complete set of photos from this tour is available in my gallery.

### **A perfect day (2011-02-06 07:17)**

I had a glorious day today. Although Sylvia is in full-day daycare two times per week, it's been over two weeks since I've had a string of hours to work. And folks, I love to have several uninterrupted hours to work. For me, right now, it doesn't get much better than six hours of me and my laptop at a coffee shop working on my photography business.

My major focus this morning was on strategic planning. I purchased a workbook to help me create a business plan. I'll admit here in a hushed whisper that although I've been in business for 32 months, I don't have a written-down business plan. Shhhh. It's in my head. But not on paper. Until now. I started today and plan to finish a draft by the end of the month.

One of the first exercises in this workbook is to envision your perfect day. The idea is to think about the things in life that give me the most joy so I can be sure my plan aligns my personal and professional goals.

I've had fun with this exercise. And I thought I'd share my perfect day mullings here.

## Perfect Day 1

I wake up to glowing sunlight sparking on freshly fallen snow and I snuggle back down into my thick, soft sheets. I feel rested, having just gotten 8 hours of sleep, and as I roll over, I see the snuggly body of a little one curled between me and Bryan. A few moments later, I hear some pitter pats of feet, and a second sleepy child is cuddling. Hands touch, arms wrap, we all breathe deeply together. Words don't come for a while as we all slowly wake up together, ready to start a new day. Then somebody tickles somebody. Giggles erupt. There's some wrestling and laughter, and everyone bounds out of bed to get dressed and ready for school and work and daycare.

I take my laptop to a cozy cafe, order a latte, and settle down for seven hours of uninterrupted work. No meetings, no errands, no housework, no phone calls. Just me and my to-do list. Four hours later, I stand up and buy lunch. A couple hours later, I get up, stretch, and head out pick up my kids. I'm refreshed and energized from my day. It's as if the computer and I just wrote a symphony together and I can still hear the melody running through my mind.

The kids and I come home, the two of them chatting about their days. At home, I smile at the clean, unclutteredness of our surroundings. I check the mail - a letter from a friend! The kids and I eat a healthy, yummy snack and sit down to read a couple chapters from a book together. I love feeling their bodies warm against mine as we read together. They tell me more about their day and then they run off to play imaginative games happily together. The doorbell rings - it's a shoe delivery! Our baby sitter comes over and makes supper for the kids while Bryan and I get ready to go out for sushi. We kiss our smiling kids adieu and head out for an evening of adult conversation, good food, and companionship.

Ahh, yup, that sounds like a perfect day to me. But it's not the whole picture. So here's

## Perfect Day 2

The kids, Bryan, and I all wake up in a tent. Only the birds can be heard. Getting up and dressed is a disorganized, messy endeavor, but we all laugh through it. The day lays before us like an adventure - there will be swimming and hiking and birding and climbing. Berries may be eaten. Campfires will be built. Mosquitoes and flies don't exist.

The day is ours, and we spend it - mostly together, sometimes alone - outdoors. Until the diamond-like stars fill the sky, the fire burns down, and we all turn in (a little sticky from all the 'smores), under the same tent where we sleep and dream together as a family.

## Then there's Perfect Day 3

Someone I love but who lives far away (ie. Maretta, LuAnn, Melanie, Heather, Grace) is in town. We spend a few hours together walking around or making something or shopping or cooking together. It's a lot of fun! In the afternoon, I take my camera and head outdoors to photograph flowers and trees and other things that hold still and don't make demands on me. My spirit is restored. I look at the calendar and realize that a friend should be receiving the surprise bouquet of flowers I had sent to them. It makes me smile to imagine their happiness. When I check my email, I see that I've got a couple new client inquiries and another client wrote to tell me how happy she is with her pictures. I feel happy and satisfied. I pull out a couple pints of farmer's market berries and make a delicious dish to bring to an evening get-together of my Gathering Waters co-workers. The UPS man delivers a camera bag that I've been admiring for ages. My house is clean and yet, I didn't clean it. I go for a run in the evening and watch the stars come out. After dinner, Bryan and I snuggle on the sofa and watch Bleak House.

## Perfect Day 4

It's a summer morning. The kids and I meet up with Jessica, Eli, and Celia, and walk down to the pool for swimming lessons. The day is already hot, and the sun is bright. The kids are laughing and playing, running up

ahead. While the kids are in the pool, Jessica and I lean back on the pool deck and soak up the sun while we catch up and help each other clear our minds. After swimming lessons, we walk the kids home and play in the yard and the garden for a while, playing peek-a-boo with the girls in the bean tepee. A baby sitter comes over to take care of the kids while Jessica and I go to a spa for massages and facials and (hey why not) pedicures and manicures too. Then we stop for a delicious, locally grown and amazingly tasty meal. We go shopping for cute new summer dresses. When we come home, our husbands have gotten together to prepare a delicious dinner - grilled chicken, corn salsa, watermelon, and a strawberry spinach salad. The kids eat and then run off to play while the adults all sit around the picnic table, watching the cool evening settle across the sky. We drink sangria and laugh and breathe.

...

I'm sure I could come up with more! There could be a perfect day at Jack's, a perfect day in Texas, a perfect day on vacation with my honey, a perfect day including one-on-one time with each of my kids. I like the fact that each my perfect days are relatively attainable. There's a lot of child care available in my perfect days. And a lot of unscheduled time for myself. And there is a serious absence of any household maintenance in my imaginary perfect days. Interesting:)

Well that was a fun exercise. It certainly put a smile on my face. Thanks for reading!

Now it's your turn. What would a perfect day be like for you? What's stopping you from making your perfect day happen?

### **The Princess Bride (2011-02-07 07:07)**

My kids are completely smitten with the movie The Princess Bride. It's one of my favorite movies, and I find myself regularly thinking that each scene is the one I like best.

When Sylvia reads books or watches movies or sees a picture, she immediately identifies who she is and who others are. For example, while reading Good Night Moon, she'll interrupt right away to point out that she's the little bunny and I'm the mommy bunny and Andrew's the kitty and Daddy is the mouse.

So while watching The Princess Bride, a running dialogue from the kids is who is who. Andrew is Wesley...the man in black.





And in the opening sequence when Buttercup comes in riding a horse, Sylvia yells out, "There you, Mommy!"



I'm often surprised that Sylv has given me the role of Buttercup. After all, she becomes a princess and wears beautiful dresses.



But yet, I'm consistently given the Buttercup role.

So now you're wondering who Sylvia says she is. Here it is:



Humperdink

It cracks me up each time. "There I am! Humperdink!"

Andrew's favorite scenes (based on how many times he rewinds and re-watches them) are split between this one:

1922



and this one:



When I asked her what her favorite scene was, she told me it was when "the little guy" says, "really?"



I'm gratified to know that while my little girl nurtures some serious princess-y affections that she mixes it up now and then:)

Speaking of which, I saw this book, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the front line of the new girly-girl culture*, and right away I've put it on reserve from the library (although I'm #80 on the list, so it may be a while). It



sounds like a funny book much-needed book. Here's a quote I found:

I mean pink is just a color, but it's a small slice of the rainbow and it comes to represent this little box that gets tighter and tighter around girls that tells them that girlhood is defined by makeovers at four years old and princesses and being the fairest and ultimately the hottest of them all.

## Winter's cold (2011-02-10 11:06)

I woke up to a chilly world this morning. When I hopped into my car at 5:15, the thermometer read -12°. Burr! The humidity is low, the sky is clear, and the stars pop against the inky darkness like Valentine jewels tossed up into the firmament.

As much as my skin would like it to be, oh, 80 degrees warmer, I do love these frigid winter days. I love the pink sunrise that reflects on the heaping mounds of fresh snow. I love to hear the squeak and metallic crunch of super-cold snow under my feet. (You can tell it's really cold by the sound of your boots, walking.) I love how clear and brilliantly blue the sky gets on a winter day, and how blindingly white the glittery snow is. Light is bouncing everywhere, and yet warming little!

Today is Sylvia's very last day of being 2-years-old. It's a sparkly day, and she is a sparkly girl.

Here's a poem about February that makes me smile as things do when they hit upon the kernel of truth:

### February

Around, above the world of snow  
The light-heeled breezes breath and blow;  
Now here, now there, they wheel the flakes,  
And whistle through the sun-dried brakes,  
Then, growing faint, in silence fall  
Against the keyhole in the hall.

Then dusky twilight spreads around,  
The last soft snowflake seeks the ground,  
And through unshaded window panes  
The lamp-rays strike across the plains,  
While now and then a shadow tall  
Is thrown upon the whitewashed wall.

The hoar frost cackles on the trees,  
The rattling brook begins to freeze,  
The well sweep glistens in the light  
As if with dust of diamonds bright;  
And spreading o'er the crusted snow  
A few swift-footed rabbits go.

Then the night silence, long and deep,  
When weary eyes close fast in sleep;  
The hush of Nature's breath, until  
The cock crows loud upon the hill;



And shortly through the eastern haze  
The red sun sets the sky ablaze.

James Berry Bense

Happy winter, all!



### **Sylvia Dotzour turns Three! (2011-02-11 12:37)**

Hidey ho there, neighbors!

My little girl woke up this morning, a freshly minted Three. Remarkable!

She's spending the day at Donna's (daycare) where they had a cake and balloons. When we arrived (a little late today as there was some extra morning activities around here), all the kids were hiding and jumped out to yell, "Surprise!" Ahh, birthdays are fun.

Andrew has been so sweet and loving toward her. I personally recall some March 19ths in years past when I was, oh, shall we say a little jealous, of all the attention that Michael Jacob Babler was receiving. Not so for Mr. Andrew. That makes it extra-nice.

I'm home sans kids today, working on a photo class I'll be leading, wedding contracts for this summer, and a beautiful photo order. With a kitty by my side, I'm having a great day too.

1926

Then I remembered that I needed to make a cake. Sylvia suggested a yellow cake with purple frosting. I made my mom's buttermilk cake for the SuperBowl party last weekend ("Go Pack!"), so I wanted to try something new. For those of you who don't know me, I have issues repeating the same recipe.

Deb Perelman from The Smitten Kitchen is one of my favorite food writer/photographers, and she specializes in cakes. So when I saw that she had a "Best Birthday Cake" recipe, I had to try it. Funny thing, it's almost identical to my mom's buttermilk cake. We'll see how it turns out.

I enjoyed whipping it up solo. Not having kids around:

a) made the job faster

b) made the job feel more luxurious

and

c) meant that I got to lick the beater, spoon, and bowl all myself.

No lunch necessary today.

I'm looking forward to frosting it!

Here's a little video I made of Sylv trying on her new birthday shoes. A few weeks ago she told me she wanted purple shoes for her birthday. I was curious what she was thinking, so we shopped on Zappos together. It was a bonding experience. I sent the link of her favorite pair to Granny, and she went ahead and got them for her. Good thing too as about the first thing out of Sylvia's mouth this morning was, "Where are my birthday shoes?"

Enjoy!

[flickr video=5436269111]

### **Sylvia's birthday part II (2011-02-12 07:00)**

Our little Sylv's 3rd birthday was a hit. After we put the kids to bed, Bryan and I sat down and looked at the pictures from the day Sylvia was born. You can see her tiny baby pictures here on Flickr. Hard to believe that she was ever that small, but it's clearly the same little person!

It sounded like Sylvia had a great day at Donna's. She said that all her friends sang to her, and she even got some gifts. Fairies!

Here's some pictures of our evening. More are available in the gallery.

Here's some pics of today's cake making.



Mmm cake batter. The recipe is [here](#). I've hit upon a new standard for cakes. This is going to be my go-to cake recipe from now on.



Frosting in-progress. I decided to use the Smitten Kitchen's Swiss Buttercream. It was fun to make and deeeelish!



The final result. A girl's purple cake as requested.



Sylvia requested spaghetti and tofu with peas on the side for her birthday supper. And she got to eat off the "I'm special today" red plate. Afterward, we retired to the living room for some present opening. Here's she's admiring some little bunnies.



Opening a fairy wing/long glove/wand set that Bryan and I found recently.





Andrew got a gift too. Granny and Grandad got him this cash register for Christmas, but it was back-ordered and only arrived yesterday. It worked out perfectly because he was kinda bummed when he saw the stack of presents that Sylv was going to get to open. "I wish I got a present too!" he moaned. Then he smiled really big when I told him that there was indeed one for him. He spent the evening adding numbers on the cash register's calculator.



Sylv got a fairy dress in the mail today from her great-Grandma Jo.



Here she's casting a flying spell on me.



I love this picture. And I love this girl.



Granny made a new mattress along with a blanket and pillow for the crib. Sylv put it straight to work.



Lola Mae doll tries out the new bedding.



And Ellie gets the pillow and blanket.





With the presents all opened, we headed into the kitchen for some cake.



Yum, yum! This time instead of eating all the frosting and leaving the cake, she ate all the cake and left the frosting. One never knows.





I'm excited to have a three-year-old in our home again. Can't wait to see what the year will hold for our little girl. Love her soooo much!

#### **Favorite parts of the day (2011-02-13 07:48)**

I transcribed this from a voice memo I made on my phone on January 5. I thought about attaching the audio file, but when I hear my recorded voice I kinda want to yell and run the other direction, so I thought I'd stick with the written word.

#### **Favorite moment of the day part 1.**

I'm standing in front of Andrew's school, looking off, when suddenly he runs at me and before I know it, his five-year-old arms are wrapped around my waist. I look down, and his snowsuit covered head is pressed tight against my tummy. So I put both hands on either side of his cheeks and tilt his head back so I can see him.

His eyes are sparkling and glinting, and he has a cute smile spreading between my hands. I bend down and kiss his forehead. I don't think that much could be sweeter.

#### **Favorite moment of the day part 2.**

I come-to in the darkness of my bedroom, warm in my flannel sheets; and I feel pressed against my back a tiny body, her arm, reaching over my shoulder. She's awake, and she can tell I'm waking up too. She snuggles her head into the back of my neck.

I take a few breaths, enjoying being together. Then I roll over and hug her. Her little two-year-old body can fit just inside my arms.

"Good morning, Sweetie," I say. "I'm so happy to see you."

She says, "Mommy, you're my best friend in the whole world."

Hard to imagine a nicer way to wake up.

### **Missing (2011-02-14 07:34)**

I'm not sure why, but this weekend I decided to pull up a box of papers I've stored in the basement from college and graduate school. Amidst old writing assignments, memorabilia, and material from my semesters abroad, I had years and years of letters.

You see, one thing about me is that I don't throw away letters. I do toss cards, but letters, even little notes, get kept. EVERY one. For my WHOLE LIFE. There's a lot of paper in boxes in my basement.

This afternoon, I decided to tackle one of the boxes because I was sure that a lot of it could go. A few hours later, it turned out that I only got rid of about 1/8 of the stuff. Still too connected to all the rest. For the first time, I pulled out all the letters from the late 90s and looked through each one. It was a wacky trip down memory lane. I got accepted to college, went away from my dear friends, met great college friends, met Bryan, went abroad to Botswana and Australia/NZ, graduated from college, and got married. Through all those transitions, I got a lot of mail. My mom wrote to me extensively. Heather, you wrote so much I was a little stunned. There are lots of notes in there from Sarah, my college roommate. Sarah, I still had about every note you left me such as, "I'm going to have lunch with my sister. See you at 6 for the concert." There were notes from Anne and Kacy and from my grandparents. It's pretty neat.

My mom sent me multiple postcards a week during my first years of college. Looking through the stack of cards from her, I felt immersed in her writing. I could hear her voice coming off the pages. A couple times I had to shake myself as if from a dream to remember that these letters are from over a decade ago. And that my mom is no longer here.

I feel so fortunate that my relationship with my mom was as loving and open as it was. Mom's notes to me were brim-full of loving words and praise, and it's clear from any note I saw that I was oh-so treasured by her.

It's a good reminder to me...to not hold back...to make sure I tell those who are important to me just how stellar I think they are every single day. And to put it in my own hand writing too.

???

I just sat down this evening to transcribe more of Mom's recipes onto the computer for the cookbook I'm making of her recipes. Looking at her hand-written recipes (you can see them all here), I was just a little overcome with missing her.

Mom had this whole, full life that she wrote about to me when I was away. She made all these great recipes that she wrote down. And now she's just gone. There's no more daily life, there's no more Thanksgiving yams.

We're all moving on, and for the most part I'm used to that now, but back in the 90s, we all thought we'd have so much more time together. Tonight as I look at the splattered, stained recipe card, I'm a little overcome with missing

my mom.

She's been gone now for three and a half years. I'm thankful that her absence doesn't cause so much pain, and the ache is lessening. But I still wish she was here. Oh, so much, I wish my mom was still around.

### **Sylvie's 3-yr appointment (2011-02-15 22:15)**

Yesterday Sylvia had her 3-year doctor's appointment. Her doctor is Catherine Kelley with UW Health/Unity, and we really like her. However, her office is all the way on the other side of town, and I'm a little weary of hiking all the way over there. In the last seven months/8 or so doctor's appointments, this is actually just the second time that we've seen her. Soooo if anyone has recommendations for a Unity/UW doctor on the east side of town, let me know! Specifically, I'm curious about doctors at the Monona Clinic or the McFarland Clinic. The two clinics are merging this fall and will be just down the street, so I thought I'd try to find someone there.



Sylvia had her eyesight tested at this appointment. They used a few different shapes (apple/umbrella/house) that she identified. She came out as 20/30 vision.

Height and weight-wise, she was at the 50th percentile for both. She weighed in at 30lbs 12 oz and was 37.2" tall. She was such a big girl, and did great for the whole exam. Sylv has had a cold/cough for the last week, and when they checked her ears, they said she had a mild ear infection. Poor girl. No antibiotics, though, as they said it should clear up on its own in about the same amount of time that the antibiotics would take.



When Sylv turned 3, we instituted new rules for Poodle and paci. If you haven't been around Sylvie, you may now know that she's intensely attached to her Poodle (blanket) and pacifier. There are periods when little in the world can calm her like those two comfort items. In the last year and a half, we've tried a few times to limit their use. We've had some short-term success, but have reverted to nearly full-time use when she's having a hard day. I'm not really interested in my three-year-old walking around and mumbling through her pacifier. So we decided that 3-year-olds only use paci and Poodle a) in their rooms b) on the sofa (watching a show) or c) in the car. Happily, she's on-board with this new system. We're 5 days into the Poodle & Paci Reduction System and all is well. When she needs some time with them, she goes to her room. Then she tosses them behind her as she runs back out into the house. A few times, we've even left home without them. Gotta say that it makes this mom a little nervous, but it's been going well. She's developed some much stronger abilities to self-soothe, and that, my friends, is a good thing!



These photos of Sylv are taken last weekend when we visited Tom's in-progress home on the Wisconsin River. More pics here. The new 3-year-old is wearing her new purple shoes from Granny and Grandad, her fairy dress from Grandma Jo, and her wings/gloves/wand from me and Bryan. If you can't tell, she's a fan of the new duds:)

### **Loss of appetite (2011-02-21 05:22)**

<pushes aside comforter, lifts bedraggled head>

"Hi"

I think I'm coming out of a rather intense bout of the seasonal flu. Since last Wednesday (that's five days ago), I've been down and out. On Saturday, I was expecting to start to bounce back. But no. And Sunday was more of the same. The fatigue, dizziness, exhaustion, and cough just kept on coming. For every hour I was awake, I slept or dozed for two. I'd have a burst of energy and do some parenting or home-straightening or just sitting upright and then I'd crash for a few hours.

Bryan deserves a vacation.

1940



One of my main symptoms has been a loss of appetite. Between Wednesday and Sunday, I ate almost nothing...my stomach didn't feel like it could handle it. I'd lost my sense of smell and the idea of food seemed a little repulsive. So different than normal! But as I lay in bed in my daze, I would ponder how my loss of appetite for food mirrored my lack of drive for really anything. If the word "appetite" conveys some sense of desire, some grasp our hearts have on something untasted or untried; well, my appetite grabbed its bags and headed out the door last week.

As I lay on the couch, my thoughts which normally churn from one to-do list to the next were void. I bet that thanks to Netflix instant streaming movies I've watched about 10 movies...most of them fluff. And that's about all I had the wherewithal to do - lift my gaze to a screen.

The other evening I roused myself, and Bryan asked what I was going to do.

"Put my pajamas back on," I said.

"Oooo," he joked, "I'll call the press. I hear that there's something going down at the capitol, but I'm sure that they'll be interested to hear that after being in bed wearing your clothes for the last six hours that you'll be switching it up to pajamas."

That made me laugh on and off for the last couple days.

I've thought, "Stop the press! I'm opening a can of chicken and rice soup! I'm not sure, but I might be feeling hungry!"

When I woke up at 4 this morning, my tummy was grumbling. Can't say that my appetite has returned, but I did feed myself the rest of that can of soup.

Fingers crossed that I'm finally on the mend!

## 7.3 March

### **March!! (2011-03-02 13:03)**

Welcome to March everyone! I put up a new theme on my blog to celebrate. I think all the snowmen decorations are going to come down pretty quickly here. I do love winter, but I think January and February are the appropriate time to celebrate wintery-ness. March is the home to my favorite holiday - St. Patrick's Day! It's the perfect month to clothe ourselves in shades of green and to put rainbows and shamrocks all around.

I've been getting Cricket magazine non-stop since 1985, and I love pulling out past March issues to read some of the great stories of leprechauns and magic. Andrew declares with much conviction that St. Patrick's Day is also his favorite holiday.

Speaking of the kids, I have a couple things I've been meaning to share about them.

1. As far as I can tell, Andrew and Sylvia really don't know which of our cats is Bowser and which is Spooky. They are bothers, and they are cats, but Bowser is black and while while Spooky is all black. Yesterday, Sylvia looked

at Spook and said, "Hi Bowser!" "That's the black kitty," I said. "I know," she replied, "hi Bowser." Andrew also seems to just say whichever name comes to mind first. Makes me shake my head and laugh.

2. Along the same lines, Sylvia doesn't name her dolls/toys. People we meet will often ask her the name of the doll she is carrying. She gives them a blank look. I've named several of them, and she'll use those names sometimes. And recently she's been naming dolls Ellie because Celia's doll is Ellie. But that's only when she's prompted for a name. This also makes me smile and laugh.

3. Andrew is a Yahtzee-playing machine. The last couple days I think he's played 20 games. Fortunately, it's a game that can be played solo. And he's getting great at adding. He's now learned how to use his new cash register calculator to add all the numbers, and with some prompting, he's also learning how to add the ones/tens/and hundreds columns and how to carry when adding. That boy of mine gets interested in something and there is no stopping him. At least until he stops at some point on his own. If you see him in the future, you may refer to him as Andrew Yahtzee Dotzour. That boy gets an unnatural number of Yahtzees.

4. Do you like the game Angry Birds? Andrew would play it constantly if he had an iPod/Pad/Phone of his own. Michael sent me the following video of a family who made their kid an Angry Birds cake for his 6th birthday. Looks like the kind of thing that Andrew would definitely get behind!



IFRAME: <http://www.youtube.com/embed/-hwVRzaQNkA>

OK, those are my random thoughts for today. I've recovered from whatever horrible virus I had back in mid-February, but I've still got an intense, hacking cough. Hopefully in another couple weeks I'll be 100%! I'd love to get to run and work-out again!

### Jamaica vacation (2011-03-03 07:04)

I wasn't necessarily planning to do a post on my recent trip to Jamaica. Seems a little like rubbing it in when I'm quite aware that most of my friends and family are working away in dark, cold northern climes. But I did post photos to Flickr. I didn't take my camera with me at the request of my husband who thought our vacation might be significantly more fun if I wasn't in PhotoAlthea mode. However my phone works pretty well as a camera, and all the images we took I was able to upload to Flickr from the hotel lobby.

So here's the deal. If you don't want to hear about someone else's warm-weather, ocean-oriented vacation, click away now. No hard feelings. Come back later for more regularly scheduled Dotzour news.

But for today, at the request of my sister and a couple friends, I have a little debrief of our wonderful trip to Jamaica. Yeah Mon.

Speaking of Yeah Mon, there was a sign in the Montego Bay airport for an iPhone app called Yeah Mon that would translate from Jamacian for you. Here's a screen shot. Pretty silly stuff.



Bryan and I got to travel to Jamaica sans kids thanks to the generosity of Bryan's mom, who flew up from the sunny and beautiful Texas weather to the frigid north to watch Andrew and Sylvia while we were gone. Bryan's dad joined her for the weekend. THANK YOU guys!!!

We left Madison in the wee hours on Wednesday morning, drove to Milwaukee, flew to Atlanta, and went from there to Montego Bay, Jamaica.

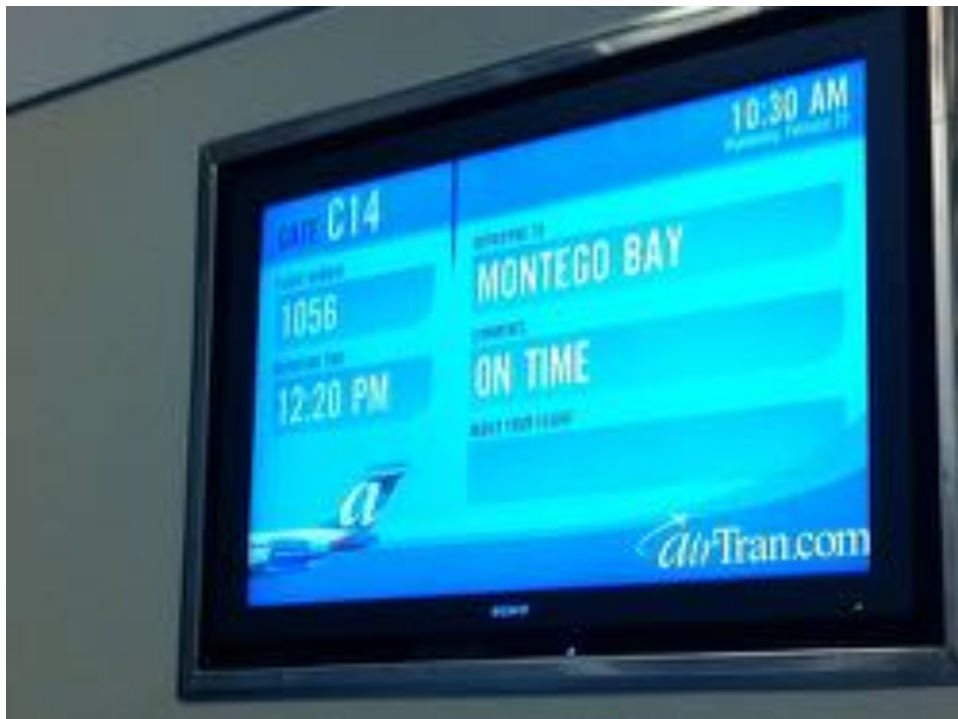
Alterra vanilla latte and a good book. A nice way to start out!



And here's a picture of a happy Bryan and Althea as we set off together.



Here's a gate that I was pretty excited to call my own.



As we flew over the ocean, I was just so in awe. As a Midwest girl, I just haven't been near the ocean that much in my life. Then we started flying over an island. Turns out it was Cuba! Look at the color of the water down there. From the air we could see from one side of Cuba to the other. And apart from the coast, the ground looked much like Wisconsin to us. Could have been Sun Prairie down there:)





We're not in Kansas, Toto!



We woke up at 3:30am in Wisconsin, and at 3pm, we arrived in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Our hotel was near Ochos Rios, and the bus ride there took about 2 hours. We were a little weary and felt so happy to find that our hotel - the Jewel Dunns River Beach Resort, a couples all-inclusive, was lovely. I'd been reading about it on Trip Adviser, but you never know what it'll be like until you see it. Here's the view from our bedroom.



I almost fell asleep at dinner that first night. Could have been that the cold medicine I took wasn't supposed to be combined with a couple glasses of wine.

The next day, we explored the grounds and found a good spot by the beach to relax.



Yay! We're on vacation!!



I finished *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and started in on the second book in the series. Every hour or so one of us would get up and get (free!) drinks from the bar or some (free!) food from the grill. One of my favorite drinks was called a Jamaican Smile. If you want to make it at home, combine rum cream, coconut rum, 1 small banana, strawberry daiquiri mix, pina colada mix, strawberry syrup, and ice. So sweet and sooo yummy!



Ahhh, memories.

1950





The hotel has six restaurants, and we enjoyed them all.



Day 2: Back on the beach. Agenda: read, nap, drink, eat, stare at the ocean, swim in the ocean, return to beach chair, repeat.





Look at that color!! I couldn't get enough of that turquoise and blue.



This is down in the courtyard looking up at our room. We were on the floor in the middle with the projecting balcony. Hi room!



Here's the pool with a waterfall. The swim-up bar is on the right. I'd been happily anticipating a swim-up bar.



On our third day, we floated around in the pool on mats while drinking piña coladas. Rough stuff.



I loved watching the waves wash up on the beach. I am so amazed at the tides and the salty water. Here are my footprints on the beach.



And here is a little beach scene.



There's me on the beach!

1958



Reading material - day 2 and 3.



On the third day, we went on a morning expedition to Dunn's River Falls. I didn't bring my phone, so I have no photos, but here are a bunch so you can see what it looks like. We signed up through the hotel and took a bus to the falls. From there we were assigned a guide, and we started at the bottom of the falls and climbed them holding hands. It's about 800 vertical feet from the ocean to the top of the falls, and there are lots of lagoons and pools along the way. It was a lot of fun!





Here we are on Day 3. After our trip to the falls, we spent the afternoon on the beach or at the pool. Then we got cleaned up for our last dinner. We had reservations at the Jade Samurai and were excited about enjoying some Japanese food.



Bryan volunteered to catch some flying shrimp, and here he is about to have shrimp thrown right at him!



On Sunday morning, we woke up early to watch the sun rise. There is is, coming up. Ahhh, our last hours in Jamaica. It was lovely...and I want to be there still!



Here's the two of us as we're waiting for the bus to pick us up. Adios warm and sunny Jamaica!



If you're like me (it took me a while to learn how to spell Jamaica), you don't have a good sense for where Jamaica is. Here's a map to orient you (the "A" is pointing to Ochos Rios). [Click on the map to see a larger version.](#)



That's our trip in a nutshell! We got home late on Sunday night. I'm so glad that Bryan and I got to get away together for a little escape. <happy sigh> It was lovely.

## Brownies (2011-03-04 08:43)

I sent Bryan to work this morning with a pan of brownies. The thing is, he's not supposed to bring them in to work.

My Aunt Kate sent us a box of William Sonoma brownie mix for Valentine's Day, and last night after the kids were in bed, I whipped them up. "Add two sticks of butter and four eggs to the included bag of chocolate chips and the bag of brownie mix." ohhhh yeahhh



I've never actually made brownies from a mix. My mom's recipe and the King Arthur brownie recipe are about all I've ever needed in life. This box of brownie mix goodness was pretty incredible. This morning as we had brownies for breakfast, I asked Bryan if he liked these better than other brownie recipes. "Well, I don't think I've ever had a brownie better than this," he said. I might agree.

He then smiled and noted that I was going to be home alone today. Just me and a 9x13 pan of the best brownies ever. So I instructed him to put them into his car and to drive to work with them. At the end of the day, he's to bring them home. I'm not done indulging. But I daren't be left alone with me and a pan of brownies that would whisper sweet nothings to me from their perch atop the refrigerator. I just know that wouldn't end well:)

The mix is made by the folks at Baked NYC. After doing a little hunting around online, I found the recipe for one of their brownies (I've copied it below). I'm not sure that this is the recipe for the "Deep dark chocolate brownie" mix that we have, but I'll think I'll have to try it out! Also, if I ever want to put on some weight, I think I'll have to check out their cookbook: Baked: New Frontiers in Baking. Yum!

THE Baked Brownie

Printer Friendly Version

Ingredients:

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons dark unsweetened cocoa powder
- 11 ounces dark chocolate (60 to 72 % cacao), coarsely chopped
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon instant espresso powder
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup firmly packed light brown sugar



- 5 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Butter the sides and bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and cocoa powder; set aside.
3. In a large bowl set over simmering water, stir together chocolate, butter, and instant espresso powder until completely melted and smooth. Keeping the bowl over the water, turn off the heat and add the sugars. Whisk until completely combined. Remove the bowl from the pan and cool to room temperature.
4. Once the chocolate mixture is cool, add 3 eggs and whisk until combined. Add the remaining two eggs and whisk until combined. Add the vanilla; stir until combined. Be sure not to overbeat the batter at this stage or your brownies will be cakey.
5. Sprinkle the flour mixture over the chocolate mixture. Using a spatula, fold the flour mixture into the chocolate until just combined. (a bit of the flour mixture should still be visible).
6. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake, rotating the pan halfway through baking time, in the center of the oven for 27-30 minutes until a toothpick inserted into the center of the brownies comes out with a few moist crumbs clinging to it. Place the pan on a wire rack and let the brownies cool completely. Cut into squares and serve.

Source: Baked: New Frontiers In Baking

**Tappin' girl (2011-03-05 07:13)**

Last week, Sylvia had her last YMCA ballet class.



They invited parents into the studio for the last class, and it was such fun to watch them dance around. My daughter, my exuberant daughter, is at a point where she often doesn't like it when other people look at her. Her birthday was a bit tumultuous this year because of all the attention. I think she likes the spotlight on her terms.

So when she saw that other people's parents would be watching, she curled up by my back and stayed there for most of class. Celia arrived a little late for class, and Sylvia almost frolicked out to join her friend. But a rubber-band like energy snapped her back to her hiding place. Her class is a half hour long, and when there were 10 minutes left, I stood up and joined the girls on the floor. Within a few minutes, Sylvia was hesitantly skipping with her friends, and then she joined the group for the last five minutes. They're all so cute! I would have loved to get more pictures, but I didn't want to break the spell for my suddenly-shy dancer.

Celia, on the other hand, was just sparkling with delight that her mom and brother were there. I've rarely seen such a sprightly little dancer.

We weren't able to find a Monday ballet class for the next session, but Jessica found a pre-tap class on Mondays at the West YMCA. So the morning after I returned from Jamaica, I picked up some tap shoes for my dancer and we headed over to the Y for her first class. It's so cute! I'll have to get pictures of the tappin' girls soon. Sylvia seems to love these classes, and they sure do bring a smile to my face. Yay for girls!

### **Shamrocks! (2011-03-13 20:58)**

St. Patrick's Day is my favorite holiday. I love it! I've written in the past about some of the joys that St. Patrick's Day brings me, so I won't do that again (today). Suffice to say that it's a jolly holiday. A splash of green just when we need it most. A smile and a story and a bit o' fun.

This year, we kicked off the week of St. Patrick's Day with a 5K run (the Shamrock Shuffle) and then Madison's St. Patrick's Day parade. This morning I met up with a group of friends from Bootcamp, and we joined up in our green

gear to run. Here's a pic of us from after the race (I'm second on the right).



I'd (accidentally) signed up for the 10K, and I had been thinking about running it, but between sickness and vacation, I did almost no running this last month, so I decided against the longer distance. In fact, I was pretty on the fence about running at all as my cough has returned. I was sick with the respiratory flu in mid-February, coughed through Jamaica, coughed for a week, and then after four days of being on asthma inhalers, my cough was gone. Delight! That was Friday, March 4. For five lovely days, I was cough-free. Then, it either came back or I got something new. I've been coughing a lot again. Gonna talk to the doctor on Monday. Geesh. Spring can't come soon enough. So the point of that ramble was that I wasn't sure if I should go out in 25 degree weather running today. But I did. And it was a lot of fun. And during the race...I didn't cough once.

Because of my lung gimpy-ness and the fact that I hadn't gone for a run in a month, I decided to run fast but not to try to make my best time. Mission accomplished. Here's my results.

## Madison Shamrock Shuffle - 2011



Madison Shamrock Shuffle - 2011

5K Run

March 13, 2011 in Madison, WI

## Althea Dotzour

<b>bib number:</b>	385
<b>age:</b>	33
<b>gender:</b>	F
<b>location:</b>	Madison, WI
<b>overall place:</b>	182 out of 1435
<b>division place:</b>	16 out of 384
<b>gender place:</b>	55 out of 973
<b>time:</b>	27:43
<b>pace:</b>	8:55

My best 5K time was 24:50, so this is a few minutes slower than that, but it'll give me room to improve through the season:)

After the race, I went home and picked up the kids, and we went down to the square for Madison's St. Patrick's Day Parade. Here are my own little sweet leprechauns.



While I was watching the parade, I took off one of my clogs. Next thing I knew, Sylvia had removed one of her shoes too. Such a cutie. She can't wait to be "a big mommy."





The kids gathered so much candy. I couldn't believe it. As much as we get at Halloween! Andrew was the primary gatherer and then he'd turn it over to Sylvie who would deliver it back to me.

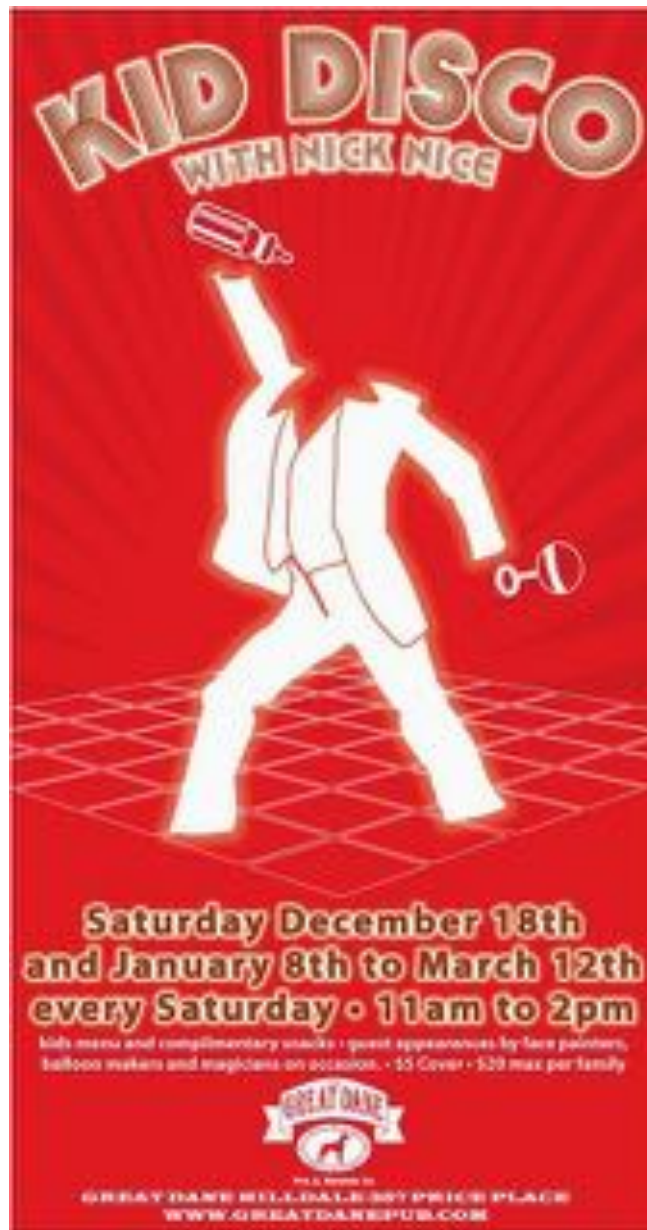


It was a fun way to start our St. Patrick's Day week. I'm planning a green pie or cake for Thursday. Andrew asked how we celebrate St. Patrick's Day, and I said that mostly you could be really happy. You could make shamrocks for your friends and wear green and keep your eyes peeled for leprechauns. Andrew decided he would make confetti out of green paper and throw it up in the air. He started his confetti stash today:)

Hope your week is full 'o shamrocks!

### **Bubbles, facepaint, and dancing (2011-03-15 07:00)**

On Saturday, we met up with some of Bryan's Widen co-workers at the Hilldale Great Dane's Kid Disco.



Bryan had taken Sylvia once before, but this was my first time going, and it really was like a crazy disco party...for the 2-8 year old set. There was loud music, a bubble machine, a magician, and Tami, our favorite face painter from Funny Faces Family Entertainment. Between that and the much-beloved "dino nuggets" and mac & cheese, Andrew and Sylvie were in 7th heaven.

I have an album of pics from the event. Here's a few favs.

Andrew was a dancing man. Off the wall! His hair was full of bubbles when he took a break:)



Sylv had fun too:)



Here's lovely Tami hard at work painting kids.



The disco dance floor.





We waited in line to get Andrew and Sylvie's faces painted. Here's some of the pretty paint pallet.



Sylvia asked for rainbow flowers.



And Andrew requested a rainbow right across his forehead.



Here's Dad admiring his new artwork.



A view from the balcony.



I'll leave you with the view from behind the bubble machine. What a great event! We'll have to try to go  
1978



again if they do it next winter!



### **Self portraits (2011-03-16 07:34)**

Over the weekend, I decided to try out some self-portraits. I had a few minutes while the kids were occupied, and I'd been meaning to take self-portraits as it was a suggested assignment in one of the photography books I've been reading.

I propped my camera (no time to pull out the tripod...the kids would be out any minute), put it on auto-timer, and tried to figure out how to focus it.



After guessing at the focus point and failing several times, I moved the kids' rocking horse to the spot where I would be. Then after pressing she shutter, I hopped into position, shoved the rocking horse out of the way, and smiled.





It worked alright! I think it would be fun to try a variety of self-portraits over the next year to see what I can do:)



### **Singing songs on St. Patrick's Day (2011-03-17 11:21)**

I hope you're enjoying a lovely start to your St. Patrick's Day! We have a pot of daffodils on our kitchen table, and they sure add a splash of sunny color to our kitchen. Andrew has been doing some fun-sounding St. Patrick's Day activities at school all week. This morning, he sang me De Colores, and I loved it so much that I bribed him to sing it again for the camera. When I downloaded it to the computer, I also found a video of Sylvia from sometime last summer.

So as your St. Patrick's Day treats for today, here are some videos of the kiddos. Enjoy, and spread the cheer!

x

IFRAME: <http://www.youtube.com/embed/GOSAlw6oEj0?rel=0>

**Spring trikin' (2011-03-18 07:49)**

This past week, spring has stirred out spirits. We pulled Sylvia's tricycle and Andrew's scooter out of the basement. We've spent time on the swings. We've gone for walks and felt the sunshine warm us.

Of course, the thermometer still reads 20 degrees when we wake up, and the highs have been in the 40s. But ahhh, how nice the 40s can feel.



Here's Sylv peddling her trike for the first time.



She was having a lot of fun running her trike over the icy puddles, cracking the ice.



Sylvia-the-ice-breaker





Sylvia has been here...shards of broken ice.



The sky's blue, and some of the maple trees are starting to bud.



She's making her way up the street. And remembering how to peddle upstairs.

1986



The she turned around and zooomed all the way down the hill.



## Weekend in Chicago (2011-03-20 22:19)



I'm writing with a smile on my face. I've just got back from a wonderful weekend in Chicago with the company of my siblings and friends (photos gallery here). Michael turned 30 on March 19, and on Thursday, Joe flew in from Washington DC to surprise him. Dad picked up Joe at the Milwaukee airport and delivered him to Michael's house. I wish I'd been there to see Michael's expression when Joe appeared at his door.

On Friday, Sylvia was at Donna's house, so I had the opportunity to meet Joe and Dad and Michael for lunch at Hubbard Street Diner. (Lisa had convinced Michael to take Friday off work as she knew that Joe was going to be in town...sneaky sneaky!) Joe and Michael went to an arcade to do Dance Dance Revolution, just like they did in the old days.

Andrew and Sylvia were delighted to see their uncles after their days at school and daycare. Then we all came back to our place where we enjoyed homemade pizza for dinner. Later that evening, Josh (Michael's friend from high school) arrived from the Twin Cities. A few minutes later, there was another knock at the door, and Mareta walked in. She'd driven down with Josh to surprise Michael. Kyle wasn't able to join us due to a heavy workload, so we (especially Michael and Bryan!) missed seeing him.

On Saturday morning, we drove down to Chicago.



I took lots of sibling pictures throughout the weekend. We were all together for about three hours on Christmas Eve, and then we were together at Joe's graduation last May. Since our times together have been few and far between, I wanted to photo-document it:)





Here's Michael and Lisa at the Oasis where we stopped for lunch.



After picking up Michael's friend Matt in Chicago, we all headed to Chicago's Science and Industry Museum.





I hadn't been to the Museum of Science and Industry since I was a young kid, and there were only a couple exhibits that I recognized. We all enjoyed the chick hatchery where we saw some baby chickens coming out of their eggs. They have the same birthday as Michael!



The train section was pretty cool and made us all think of Terry. He's in Death Valley with Jack and Tom and Peter this week (you can see his pictures here), so sadly, he missed our Chicago outing. We took this photo (standing in front a of a large steam locomotive) for him:)



There were some incredible exhibits on avalanches, tornadoes, tidal waves, and lightening in the Science of storms area. Andrew got pretty nervous, so he and Michael and Lisa peeled off and explored on their own. Word was that Andrew was a big fan of the climbing wall.



Sylvia had a fun time at the museum. Her favorite exhibit was the "Fairy Castle." Here's a pic of my ballerina girl looking at a ballerina bear. They match!



After the museum, we headed over to Ron of Japan, our family's first place to eat in Chicago. Here's Michael with his gift from Maretta: a Ghost Buster's costume...just like the one Mom made him when he was about six.



We had a group of 10, so it was a little cozy at our table (made for 8), but we're all friends!





Maretta and Joe get a little sibling cuddle.



Andrew loves Uncle Joe!



So does Sylvia.



After dinner on Saturday night, we headed back to Matt's apartment to play games and hang out.





Maretta knitting (two socks at once...toe-up).



There's the birthday boy!



While we played a game called Bang, I played with my camera and flash. Thanks to everyone for being accommodating and patient with me while I played with the remote external flash!









What a great day! Our bellies were full, and the room was full of laughter. Plus, we were looking forward to brunch at the Four Seasons the next morning:) Ahh, as Matt said, the Babler crew is about Art and Food and Family. Makes me smile.

### **Wisdom for the day (2011-03-23 10:49)**

I absolutely love Katrina Kennison.

It seems that growing up, even at my age, is all about making the commitment, again and again and again, to bring my outer persona into alignment with my inner truth, my words into alignment with my deeds, my thoughts into alignment with my actions, my deepest values into alignment with my smallest choices, my heart into alignment with my mind, until what I do and how I live is a reflection of who I truly am.

Hope that quote from her blog today brings as much centering peace to you as it did to me:)

In other news, spring is really and truly here. It's been raining for the last couple days. Today started out in the low 30s with rain. There's a light layer of slushy snow. All this wet will help green up the earth soon. And before we know it, the soft, flowery version of spring will be upon us. The robins are singing their spring songs. The red wing black birds and sandhill cranes have returned. For weeks, we've been hearing lovely sound of running water as the snow has melted and runoff moves through puddles on the street and down into the storm drain. I stand near the storm drain and smile to hear the sound of liquid water again. Here's a clip (made with my phone) so you can hear it too -> ripples

I've taken the last couple days off bootcamp again because my cough, while much improved, is still giving me trouble. Seems like a couple hours extra sleep and a break from the physically strenuous activity might help. Instead, Jessica and I went to a lovely yoga class last night. I haven't practiced yoga for years and years. It felt so good.

Maureen Hebl was a wonderful instructor, and I'm hoping to regularly attend the Wednesday night class.

Bryan starts up the spring ultimate frisbee league next week, with games on Tuesday and Thursdays. Between that and his new (soon-to-be-picked-up) kayak, he's sure to have some great outdoor experiences this spring and summer.

I'll leave you with a pic of Sylvie pulling out of our (newly cleaned out) garage with her trike. Sure do love that girl!



#### **Four Seasons brunch (2011-03-25 07:19)**

If you find yourself in Chicago on a Sunday morning with some extra cash to spend, I recommend, nay, beseech you to try brunch at the Four Seasons Hotel. It's an incredible experience.

Last weekend, our crew of 10 went to the brunch. It was the first time we've gone to brunch without any adults. Kinda felt odd. I think all of us particularly missed Mom.

Before we left, we took some photos. Here's my kids being cute siblings.



Look at this little girl's long, long legs!





A quick pic of me and Bryan.



And me with Joe, Michael, and Mareta.



Here's a quick picture of one of our tables at brunch.



And after brunch, here's an iPhone pic of our group in the hotel lobby (Bryan's the photographer).



Michael and Lisa, feeling glad.



I love these next two. Bryan pulled out the camera to snap a couple pictures of me and Joe and Maretta and Michael hugging goodbye.







Thanks to Joe and Maretta for making the trip so we could all be together:)

### **Kayak!! (2011-03-26 07:28)**

My sweet guy Bryan has been looking to get out on the water. These last years with small kiddos haven't afforded us ample opportunities for hiking and canoeing, and I think we're both ready to pick up those wonderful activities again. Last summer, Bryan joined up with some friends for a weekend on the Kickapoo River. Here's a photo of him that a friend took of him...



He loved being out on the river, and later in the summer, he and I took an intro kayaking class at Rutabega Paddle-sports. It was so fun!

After mulling it over for months, Bryan went to Canoecopia a few weeks ago and got himself a beautiful kayak. I'm so excited for him!!!

It came home yesterday. Here's some photos:



















The weather hasn't been going much above 39 degrees this last week, but hopefully soon the air will warm, Bryan's paddle will arrive, and he can get out on the water! If you're in Madison and like to paddle, give him a call:)

### **Spring daffodils (2011-03-27 07:19)**

There's something about March that makes spring bulbs necessary. While the tips of the daffodil plants are just peeping out of the frozen garden, my kitchen table has a pot of yellow blooms that make my heart glad. To download a high-resolution version for your desktop, [click here for picture one](#) and [here for picture two](#)!







Oh, and Grace, you know that daffodils always make me think of you:)

### **What it takes for me to get in shape (2011-03-28 07:11)**

I started this blog post last fall, but I felt a little weird about publishing it. I think that when I'm in the middle of doing something well, I hesitate to post about it because it feels a little self-aggrandizing. And then when I'm not doing something any more, it feels a little odd to write about because I'm not even doing it any more.

However, for the last eight plus months, I've put a lot of energy into exercise and food awareness, and I'd like to share some of what I've learned.

Last summer, I was feeling a little fed-up with my body. Sylvia was over two-years-old; I'd been done nursing for a year; and I was feeling unhappy with the fact that my body wasn't "bouncing" back into its pre-baby shape. I'd tried integrating more exercise into life (biking places more) eating a little less (no seconds, thanks), but that wasn't working. For one thing, my kids weren't doing well in the bike trailer, and I really like seconds.

After hearing about Dustin Maher and his Fit Fun Bootcamps from several friends, I decided to accept the invitation of a friend (thanks Deb!) to do a 21-day rapid fat loss bootcamp challenge. It was a kinda spur of the moment, "Sure, I can get up at 5am for three weeks to jump-start my motivation" thing. I remember feeling a little dizzy when I hit the registration button...what had I done?!

Well, it turned out that I loved it. Sure the first week was kinda hellish. But the friends I started making were wonderful. Starting the day with all that positive energy. I love the feeling of working harder before 6:30am than most people (at least me) work on their own all year. I love working out to a sky full of stars (summer bootcamps are



held outdoors) and then watching the sun rise. And I love, love, love the "you can do it!" energy that flows through the group.

As the 21 day challenge ended, I realized how sad I would be to stop. I also had shifted my understanding of the way that exercising unlocks inner potential. I wasn't exercising to get skinny or even to just to get in shape. I was exercising because I wanted to be the best I could be. I didn't want to let life happen to me, I wanted to take charge of my life and my body. I had a feeling that taking charge of my body would lead to dreaming bigger and acting more decisively in other aspects of my life. So I continued my membership through the summer then through the fall and winter. And I feel so lucky to know the community of trainers and fellow-bootcampers that I do.

Around Christmas, I met my goal of losing 20 lbs. I didn't start out with a weight goal...I mostly wanted to feel better about my body and to be stronger and more fit. But as the pounds came off, it became kind of exciting to see what I could accomplish with hard work and focus. I can't say that I've ever really tried to lose weight before, but what I learned this last summer and fall is that reshaping your body is completely within reach. It takes hard work and continued commitment, but it's not rocket science. Burn more calories than you consume.

Here...for myself in the future and for anyone who wants to know...are five things that I think were central to my success.

1. Write it down I find that the relatively simple step of writing down everything I eat makes a big difference in the eating choices I make. A little notebook in my purse works fine, but I've really enjoyed using the iPhone app Loseit. I don't think I can overstate the importance of this. From July-October, I wrote down every single thing I put in my mouth. If I licked the jelly off the butter knife after making my kids toast, I entered 1/2 teaspoon jelly into my journal. I was amazed at how quickly the calories add up. It was often helpful in the afternoon to see how many calories I had left for the day so I could adjust my dinner eating to meet my goals.

2. Have fitness buddies. It was thanks to my friend Deb that I started going to Bootcamp in the first place. Then within the first few weeks, I got to know a group of great girls. There's something special about getting together each morning while the rest of the world is still sleeping, and then working our butts off together that creates a special bond. More than anything else, my fitness buddies are my motivation to get moving! And they hold me accountable. It helps so much to know that if I turn off that alarm without getting up that I'm going to hear about it from my friends!

3. High intensity workouts. I imagine that lower-intensity workouts are a good match for some people. But for me, if I'm going to make the effort to work out, I want it to count. I like the feeling of pushing myself to the limit, of working as hard as I can. Bootcamp workouts are so diverse and fun, and with everyone else sweating and grunting together, it feels like a team. We do exercises for pretty short periods of time (20-40 seconds is common), break for 10 seconds, and then on to the next thing. There's a mix of cardio, weights, and core exercises, and I'm amazed that even after months of working out, I'm still often sore. Especially when we've tried pull-ups!

4. Calories/nutrition balance. So my favorite foods contain lots of sugar and fat. mmmm sugar and fat mmmm. While I was in weight-loss mode, I had to retrain my mind to think of food as fuel. I stopped spending as much time reading my favorite food blogs (I read fitness blogs instead), and I didn't check out cookbooks from the library for evening reading (I went to bed early instead). To be successful in losing weight, I cut sugar way down. For about three months, I also mostly cut out wheat. I wasn't trying to go gluten free, I was just trying to eat high protein, low carbs. We switched to sprouted wheat bread, and I'd have either that or oatmeal. No pasta for me (sniff). Instead, I got hooked on Greek yogurt (mmm). I'll do another post on what kind of foods composed my meals. The good thing: I didn't feel deprived.

5. Water and sleep. When new people start at Bootcamp, my primary advice is to drink lots of water, get

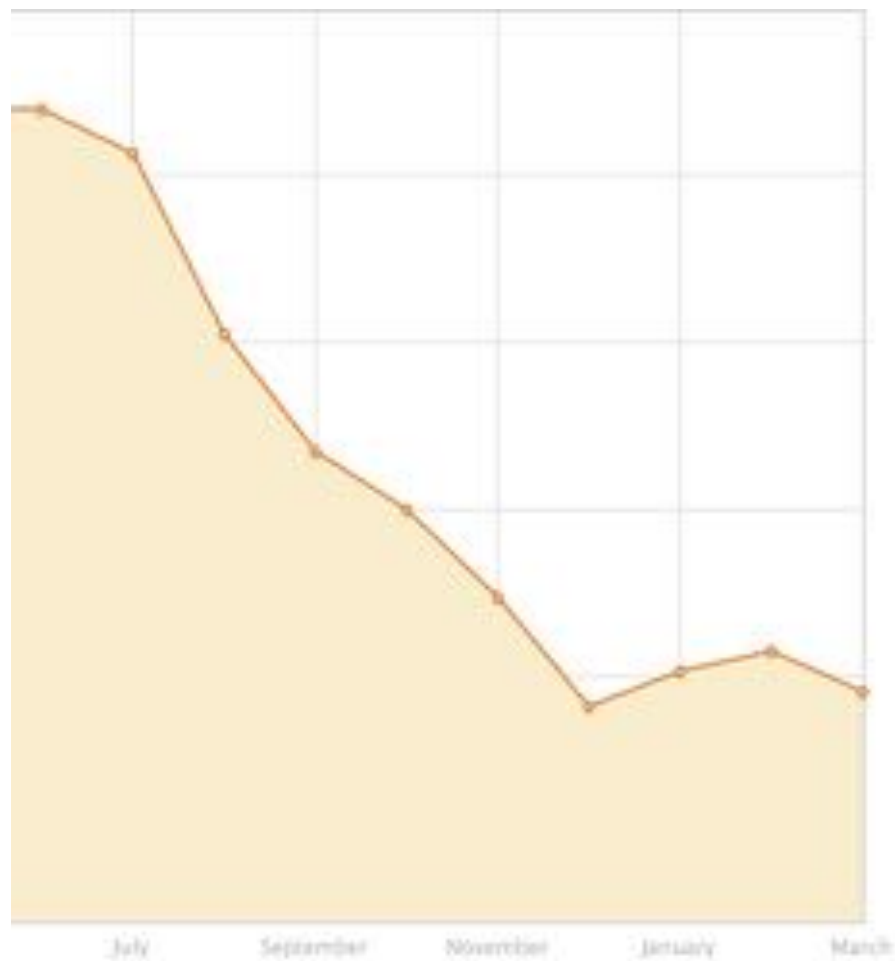
enough sleep, (and take plenty of Advil that first week!). Throughout July and August, I was exhausted all the time. I was reducing my calories and waking up early, and I remember feeling a little narcoleptic. If I sat down, I'd drift off. It helped to go to bed by 9pm so I'd get seven hours of sleep. Drinking plenty of water also helped a lot (and made it easier to cut calories). After a few months of bootcamp, either my body was used to waking up early and getting less calories or I'd gotten better about consistently going to bed early, because my energy levels popped back up.

OK, so those are the tips I'd like to remember if I ever want to undertake a get-in-shape period again.

Here's a graph of my weight loss from mid-July through October.



And here's a graph of my weight loss from July-March (highest to lowest point is 20 lbs).



I'm happy with where I'm at now. In October, I stopped journaling my food. It seemed like I'd developed an intuitive sense for what I could eat, and I continued to lose weight for another couple months. My goal for 2011 is to maintain my current weight and to stay active with workouts and regular running and 5/10K races.

I tried to find before and after pictures, but it was a little hard. While my weight and measurements have changed, and while I feel tons better in my skin, I've got to say that I don't think I look that much different! But as a photographer, I feel like a blog post would be incomplete without some images.

Here's a few before (May and June 2010):









And here are some afters (December 2010 and February 2011):



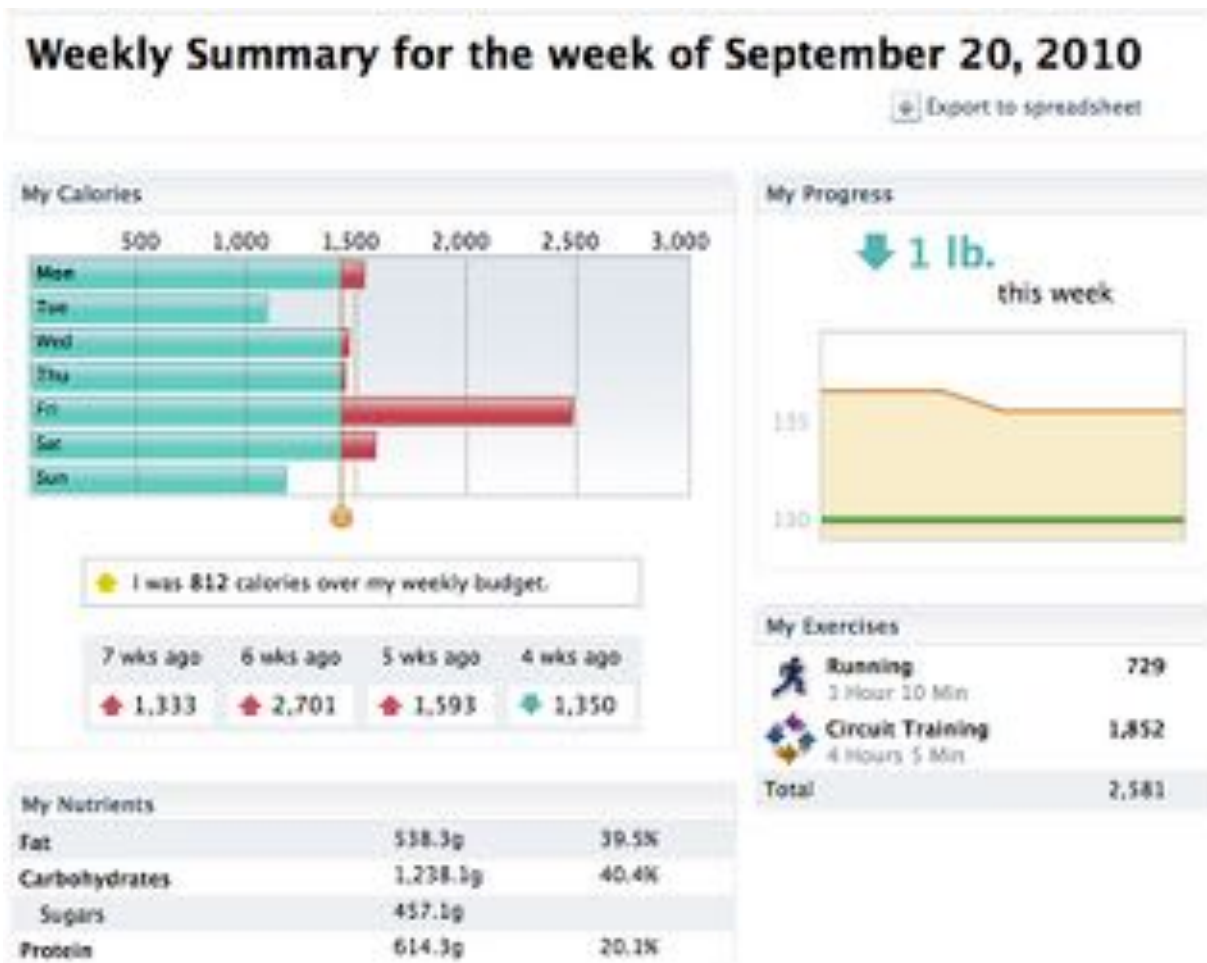
Hope this is helpful to someone out there. If all this taught me anything it's that we have the power within ourselves to change. And that taking control of my physical self let to me feeling all the more powerful about taking control of other parts of my business and life.

## Food journal revealed (2011-03-29 06:52)

Yesterday I wrote a long post about my exercising/weight loss journey. In that post, I mentioned how important I thought that food journaling was to my weight loss success. Here, I thought I'd show how I used the iPhone/web program Loseit to track my food and exercise.

After creating an account, I inputted my current weight and height, my goal weight, and the date I wanted to reach that weight. Loseit calculated how many calories I could consume per day based on the theory that losing one pound requires that you burn approximately 3,500 more calories than you consume. So without any specific exercise, I was limited to a little under 1,500 calories per day. The screenshot below is a summary of a week in September.

My bootcamp trainer, Dustin Maher, suggested that we try to eat well 80 % of the time. I liked this a lot, as it gave me permission to "cheat" every once in a while while staying on-plan. In general, I tried to keep an eye on my weekly calorie budget rather than on the daily budget. (Click on any of the images below to see a larger version.)



After each meal, I'd key in the food I ate to Loseit. I set it up with recipes for foods I made regularly, so entering

my meals was pretty straight-forward. A couple times while eating out, I'd discretely check the Loseit database to compare menu items. Sometimes I was amazed at the difference in calories between items. It really opened my eyes to how many calories I consume if I let my stomach do the ordering!

I also entered any exercising that I did (I coded bootcamp as "circuit training"), and I came to rely on the extra calories that a workout or two allowed. Some days when I'd over-indulged, I'd go for a run at night to make it balance out a little better.



In addition to the overall calories consumed, I kept a close watch on the percent of fat, carbs, and protein I ate. I aimed to get 100g of protein each day. That took some very conscious planning as I think I eat about 20g per day if left to my own devices. I tried to keep my fat consumption at around 40 % of the total and carbs and protein close to 30 %. Rarely did I succeed, but having that target really helped shape my food choices.

## Daily Summary for September 21, 2010

[Export to spreadsheet](#)

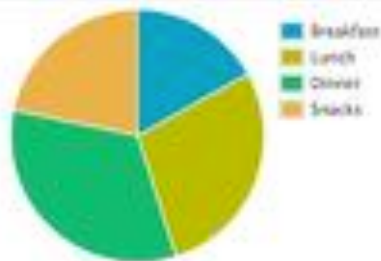
### Daily Calories



### Nutrient Calories

Fat	65.8g	47.8%
Carbohydrates	106.9g	34.5%
Sugars	38.6g	
Protein	14.5g	17.7%

### Meal Calories



Meal	Percentage
Breakfast	14.8%
Lunch	28.3%
Dinner	31.2%
Snacks	21.7%

### Today's Log

#### Breakfast: 304

	Creek Yogurt - Chobani 2% plain	38
	3/4 Serving	
	Honey, light	32
	1/2 Tablespoon	
	Homemade Lett	126
	3/4 Serving	
	Cereal, Cheerios, honey nut	49
	1/2 Cup	

#### Lunch: 511

	Egg Salad	296
	1 Serving	
	Bread, sprouted, 7 whole grain, flourless, vgg	80
	1 Each	
	Butter, salted	51
	1/2 Tablespoon	
	Apples, fresh, med, 5"	95
	1 Each	

#### Dinner: 600

	Mixed, Moderately Healthy Food	600
	1 Serving	

#### Snacks: 393

	Nuts, cashews, dry rotd, salted, whole	393
	1/2 Cup	

#### Exercise: 731

	Circuit Training	341
	45 Min	
	Running	390
	6 mph 60 Min	

I found that my weight loss didn't seem highly correlated to my food consumption for the week. Sometimes after a weekend of overdoing it, I'd lose a couple pounds. Other weeks, I'd eat nearly perfectly but lose almost nothing. However, as I kept working consistently week after week, it all seemed to workout over all.



## Daily Summary for September 22, 2010

[Export to spreadsheet](#)



In general, I think we eat pretty healthfully in our house. We don't have lots of processed food (does mac & cheese count?), we eat as much local, organic produce and meats as we can afford, and we aim for yummy, wholesome meals. However, when not making a point to eat healthfully, those wholesome meals are more likely than not to contain lots of cheese or butter or pasta. Mmmm.

<side note...look! this day I ate marshmallows for a snack!>

## Daily Summary for September 23, 2010

[Export to spreadsheet](#)



Last fall, Bryan and I attended a nutrition seminar by Tracie Hittman. She's a nutritionist who works with my bootcamp trainer, Dustin. She really recommended limiting gluten and suggested taking gelatin supplement, which we did. We also whole-heartedly jumped on the Greek yogurt band wagon. They recommended eating whole or 2 % dairy (yay!), and eating a bowl of greek yogurt and honey for breakfast is fantastic.

## Daily Summary for September 24, 2010

[Export to spreadsheet](#)



Sometimes I think that what was as important as any one piece of inspiring advice was just surrounding myself with healthful messages from all angles. My bootcamp friends were motivating, and we started running 5Ks together. I enjoyed Dustin's blog, and found great content in his daily blog that filled my mind and heart with positive, healthful ideas that kept me motivated to keep working on my own story. For example, check out this man's amazing 120lb journey.

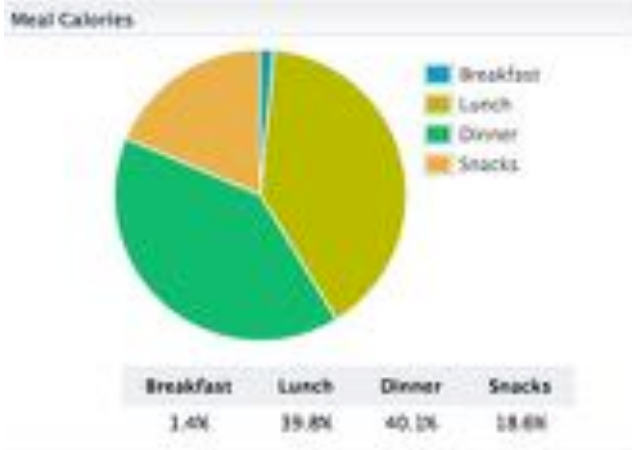
# Daily Summary for September 25, 2010

[Export to spreadsheet](#)



**Nutrient Calories**

Fat	64.7g	43%
Carbohydrates	190g	40.2%
Sugars	4.6g	
Protein	48.7g	14.9%



**Today's Log**

**Breakfast: 23**

- Coffee, brewed w/tap water 1  
4 Fluid ounces
- Pancakes, buttermilk, prep 22  
1/recipe, 4"  
1/4 Each

**Lunch: 631**

- Sandwich, Sausage Egg & American Cheese 631  
1 Each

**Dinner: 636**

- Pasta, Tomato Basil Spaghetti 636  
1/2 Each

**Snacks: 295**

- Nuts, cashews, dry rosd, salted, whole 98  
1/8 Cup
- Nuts, cashews, dry rosd, salted, whole 197  
1/4 Cup

Hope this is helpful! I've been pleased that even after stopping tracking food, I was able to lose weight for another couple months. And now that I'm in "maintenance mode," the insights I gained into eating from my food journaling seem to have stuck. If you're in the process of trying to lose weight, I know you can do it!

?

## Daily Summary for September 26, 2010

[Export to spreadsheet](#)

### Daily Calories



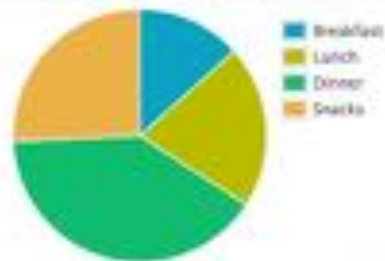
Daily calorie budget	2,000
Food calories consumed	1,301
Exercise calories burned	319
Net calories so far today	1,362

I was 218 calories under my daily budget

### Nutrient Calories

Fat	62g	35.2%
Carbohydrates	176.5g	45.9%
Sugars	22.7g	
Protein	68.5g	17.9%

### Meal Calories



Meal	Percentage
Breakfast	13.3%
Lunch	20.8%
Dinner	40.1%
Snacks	25.7%

### Today's Log

#### Breakfast: 200

Oats, steel cut	1/3 Cup	166
Milk, 1%, w/add vit A & D	1/8 Cup	16

#### Lunch: 313

Fish, tuna, white, w/water, drained, can	2 Ounces	73
Bread, sprouted, 7 whole grain, flourless, eng	2 Each	160
Dressing, mayonnaise, light	1 Tablespoon	10
Grapes, fresh	1/2 Cup	30

#### Dinner: 602

Snap Beans, green, fresh	3/4 Cup	26
Potato, Sweet Potato Fries	3 Each	470
Chicken, broiler/fryer, breast, w/skin, raw	3/4 Each	106

#### Snacks: 186

Bagel, plain, enrich, 2"	1 Each	190
Nuts, cashews, dry roas, salted, whole	1/4 Cup	187

#### Exercise: 319

Running	7 mph (56.5 min mile)	319
	30 Min	

## Fishies (2011-03-30 07:11)

Our friend Tom has been with Terry and Jack on vacation to Death Valley for the last couple weeks. While he's been gone, I've been stopping over at his place to feed his fish. This last time I was over, I couldn't help but take some pictures. Lesson learned...fish are kinda hard to photograph!



















Sylvia loves to help sprinkle the food in the tanks. But then it takes about 1 hour to convince her to leave.

Meanwhile, Terry, Tom, and Jack are enjoying scenes like this:



Amazing! More stunning photos on Terry's blog [here](#).

## A girl's laughter (2011-03-31 07:02)

Sylvia's laughter is like ripe cherries raining down from an abundant orchard.

She's so much more of a little girl now, and less of a baby. Tonight she threw her head back and bubbles of giggles spilled from her smiling lips. It's like magic, and it feeds my soul.

I wrote a little post about the same topic about a year ago.

So glad to have this little girl in our lives.







## 7.4 April

**Walk about (2011-04-01 07:28)**

Here's a few images of our home and yard in late March 2011.



I love watching the buds of the silver maple get bigger and bigger. I especially like their reddish tint against the blue of a spring day.



My Swedish geraniums made it through the winter. They are leggy and starving for light, but they all made it! (I've got six pots surrounding the sink.) Soon, soon, they can spend their days outside where their leaves will get thick and dark and healthy.





When Andrew comes home from school, he eats a lot - often a couple English muffins and some fruit. Sylv is happy to have her playmate back.



Here are the kids sitting down to watch a show. They're watching Diego for the first time. Andrew loves it and replies loudly to the TV when instructed. I've avoided Dora and Diego because of all the commercial stuff associated with them, but I think the kids are pretty aware that we don't buy things that have characters on them, so hopefully any Dora/Diego infatuation that ensues won't result in struggles at the store:)



Sylv's pacifier and poodle use is limited to the car, her bed, and the sofa. It's going really well. And at some point, I think we'll trim it down to just in her room. Sweet girl loves her p & p.

?

#### **Yahtzee Dotzour (2011-04-02 07:37)**

My dear son Andrew is rather obsessed with the game Yahtzee. Early in the morning or late at night, I hear the roll of the dice as he flies through his games. Bryan recently gathered up all his score cards and counted them, and he's played over 200 games in the last months.



As far as a game obsession, Yahtzee is great. He's getting so fast at adding up the dice...I'll admit it...he's faster than me:)



Yesterday for the first time, he totaled up the columns of numbers in his head (61 on the top, so no bonus). Up until now, he's relied on an adult or his cash register calculator to find his totals. I think it's safe to say that this boy has Bryan/LuAnn's mind for numbers:)



Good thing this game can be played solitaire!

I have an ongoing urge to enter all his scores into Excel so I can graph his results. Curious what kind of curve we'd see. However, the urge to do this is countered by my urge to do things that are useful/beautiful/productive. If anyone wants to do some data entry, I've got the sheets!

And feel free to offer to play a game with Andrew Yahtzee Dotzour.

### **Playing kitty (2011-04-03 07:52)**

One of Sylvia's favorite games is to pretend to be a kitty. The adult is a person who comes to the pet shop looking for the kitty. Sometimes the kitty runs away. Sometimes the kitty is sick. Sometimes the kitty is pink.

When Bryan came home from work the other day, Sylvia strongly requested that he play kitty. Sweetly, Bryan set down his coat/lunch/bag and acquiesced to the playtime desires of our daughter.

Here she is, in the corner, meowing as Bryan-the-customer comes to the pet store to see if there are any kitties for sale.





In this case, the kitty was a little sick, so Bryan called the vet who came to take a look at her.



The kitty is feeling a little better as Vet-Bryan examines her.



Oh, what a sweet little kitty.



It's always nice to pet your kitties to help them feel better.



Notice the ballet skirt Sylv is wearing over her footie pjs? Outfit #9 for the day.

I'm so glad that Andrew and Sylvie have such a sweet daddy to fill their buckets and to play make-believe with:)

### **Sleeping Beauty's spinning wheel (2011-04-04 07:23)**

My sister Maretta's fictional alter-ego is Sleeping Beauty. The girl loves her sleep, and she does look like an angle while snoozing. She and I shared a (very small) room growing up, and I would have the lights on and my music blaring and I would be walking across her bed, and all the while, she lay there in beatific slumber.

In addition to being a beautiful person, sister, and actress, Maretta is a knitter extraordinaire. The girl is fast, and she cranks out projects by the week. This is especially impressive to me as I crank out knitting projects on a 2-4 year time horizon.

Maretta recently took a class where she learned how to spin yarn. Now, she's addicted. She put the word out and acquired a \$20 spinning wheel. When we visited her recently, I took some photos of her demonstrating her new craft.

Here she is seated in front of the wheel.



Here's a bobbin filled with spun yarn.



Before and after. Roving becomes yarn.





Before and after closeup. You gotta love those natural fibers! Marettta is really getting on my case about getting myself a farm where I can raise alpacas for her:)



The wheel.



Here it's spinning without the wool.



And here's the wheel in motion.



I took a little video of Marettta spinning away. Enjoy! She's starting to get wool from a fiber CSA called Kindred Spirit Farm. It's such a joy to see someone you love so electrified by a new passion!

[flickr video=5584385514]

### Visit to St. Paul & Kyle's project (2011-04-05 07:46)

The weekend of March 25, we drove up to St. Paul. My childhood friend, Katie, was getting married, and as a big bonus, we also got to spend the weekend with Maretta and Kyle. Here we are in their home.



And here's the happy couple:)



Kyle is a PhD student in astrophysics at the University of Minnesota. He's been working on an experiment since he was an undergrad, and it sounds like it's making strides toward the finish line. EBEX (see Wikipedia article here or one with pictures here) is a super-special telescope that Kyle's team has been engineering. Their plan is to attach the telescope to a stratospheric balloon and launch it in Antarctica. The data it gathers should give the scientists information about background microwave radiation that may help them determine how fast the universe is expanding and what the universe might have looked at soon after the Big Bang. At least, that's my take on it. Kyle, feel free to correct me!

x

Photo credit: Asad

On Tuesday last week, Kyle and his team took off for Palestine, Texas, where they are working at NASA's Columbia Scientific Balloon Facility where they will be integrating their equipment with the balloon in preparation for the big flight from Antarctica. One of Kyle's teammates is writing a blog about their work he's also posting pictures here. The duration of this phase of the project is unknown. It could be months. So my sister's a little sad this week with her hubby gone, perhaps for months. Hopefully evening Google chats and spinning will sustain her:) Good luck on this



amazing project, Kyle!

While we were visiting Maretta and Kyle last weekend, I loved watching Maretta and Andrew snuggle and play. I'll leave you with a few cute pictures to bring a smile.







**Cute kids at Como Gardens (2011-04-06 07:33)**

Como Botanic Gardens in Saint Paul is just beautiful. And this time of year, an afternoon of warm air, green leaves, and flowers is just what we all needed.



Andrew and Sylvia were being so adorable together. Glad I had my camera on-hand to document the meltiness of it all.





Siblings exploring.



<aak> be still my heart!





Checking out the koi.





Here's Andrew's first photo taken with my camera (the strap was around my neck). A little over exposed, but it was in manual mode:)



Bryan and Sylvia share some moments by the water's edge.





This melts my heart too!



I think they're both awfully fond of each other!



And here's a sloth. I always love to see a sloth!!



### **Tuckered out (2011-04-08 07:35)**

We drove home from St. Paul on Sunday, March 27. Bryan drove the whole way; Sylvia was awake until the last half hour, and when she fell asleep, she was out cold. When we got home, Bryan carried Sylv inside and sat down with her in the rocking chair. A half hour later, he was still there, rocking her. I'm assuming that she had indicated to him that she didn't want him to leave her.

A bit later when I peeked in the room, this is the sight that met my eyes.



So I ran for my camera:)



They're oh, so sweet sleeping together.





And looking at Bryan's tall body curled up in Sylvia's toddler bed...it's about the sweetest thing I've ever seen. He's the best dad ever.





Andrew, Sylvia, and I are all oh, so lucky:)

### **Spring mud cake (2011-04-09 07:38)**

The weather is finally warming up! All it took was getting up to above 40 (I think it was 46 degrees), and my kids were barefoot and then shirtless. It is so nice to be playing outdoors again!!

After school, Alivia and Rayna came over to play. The four kids were busily running around the yard, riding bikes in the driveway, and then they disappeared to the backyard where they were all hard at work on a major project. I went to investigate with my camera in hand.

Here's the two big kids. They are just so cute together!



They were making a cake out of mud and mulch and grass and some pieces of blue construction paper and a sprinkle of sugar from the kitchen.



Adding some grassy touches...



A final stir -



And voilà! The first mud cake of the season.



I look forward to many more!



## Mom's birthday cake (2011-04-11 07:14)

My mom's 59th birthday was last Thursday, April 7. I hadn't planned any specific activities, but then I decided that we should make her a cake.



I made a tres leche cake, and boy was it yummy! We decided to meet Terry and Dad at Plaza on State Street for burgers and fries and then to head back to Terry's for cake. Plaza was a regular eating place for my family in the past. Seemed like a good place to go to raise a glass to my mom.



When we came back to Terry's the kids got to put the candles on the cake.





Terry lit the candles (I love how transfixed the kids appear in this picture!).



Then we all sang happy birthday to my mama.



And then Andrew and Sylvie blew out the candles.



Mom's birthday is definitely bittersweet. I wish she was around to celebrate. But it's a nice opportunity to remember her and celebrate the wonderful person she was. And we all certainly enjoyed her cake. Love you, Mom.

**Post for Topsy (2011-04-12 07:23)**

I thought that Topsy (Terry's mom) would appreciate seeing some pictures of Sylvia and Terry. They were having fun playing with all Terry's silly toys. Sylvie is such a talkative, delightful three-year-old big girl!)









**Young at Art (2011-04-13 07:23)**

Andrew has a piece of his art hanging in Madison's Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. We got a notice about that in the mail, and I sort of assumed that he had contributed to a mural or some collaborative piece of art. So

it was surprising and exciting to visit the museum a week ago and see instead one of his pieces framed and hanging on the wall.



The Young at Art exhibit runs at MMoCA through May 15th. Here's an article from the Badger Herald. What a cool project and a great way to promote and celebrate creativity!



According to MMoCA's website, "In preparing for the exhibition, each of Madison's public school art teachers is invited to submit up to three works created by his or her students." It's really cool that Andrew's work was chosen! Stop by to see the free exhibit if you're in Madison this next month. There's some pretty amazing pieces on display.

### **Down by the river (2011-04-14 07:45)**

A week-or-so ago, Michael, Lisa, Tom, Terry, the kids, and I all headed out to Tom's new (second) home in Lone Rock, Wisconsin. He's been working hard as the general contractor of building operations since September. Exhausting work, it seems! But now, the job is just about complete. So we came out to help get it fixed up and to enjoy some first meals in it together.

After spending a few hours inside (removing a layer of construction dirt, and moving and setting up furniture), we took a walk down to the Wisconsin River.



Sylvie loves wearing her "fruit tarts" (leotards).



Mid-April in Wisconsin. Warm air and bare trees.





Love this pic of my little Miss and her stick.



Looking downstream. The Wisconsin River is just about my favorite place on earth.





The water is so high!



Sylvie dips her stick in a shallow area (when the water is lower, the land actually extends 5-10 feet out, so the spot she is in is really shallow and still).



You can see the Lone Rock bridge up stream.



Enjoying nature (and checking the iPhone).



And I'll leave you with a few more images of trees in the water.







### **Tom's River Retreat - First visit (2011-04-20 07:53)**

Welcome to Tom's River Retreat a.k.a. Jack's Big Bluff East. It was so fun to visit for the first time. I imagine that we could spend many, many happy hours here!

Here's the view from Tom's room into the dining area.





And the view from the dining area back across the living area into Tom's room.



Lisa's setting up the kitchen.



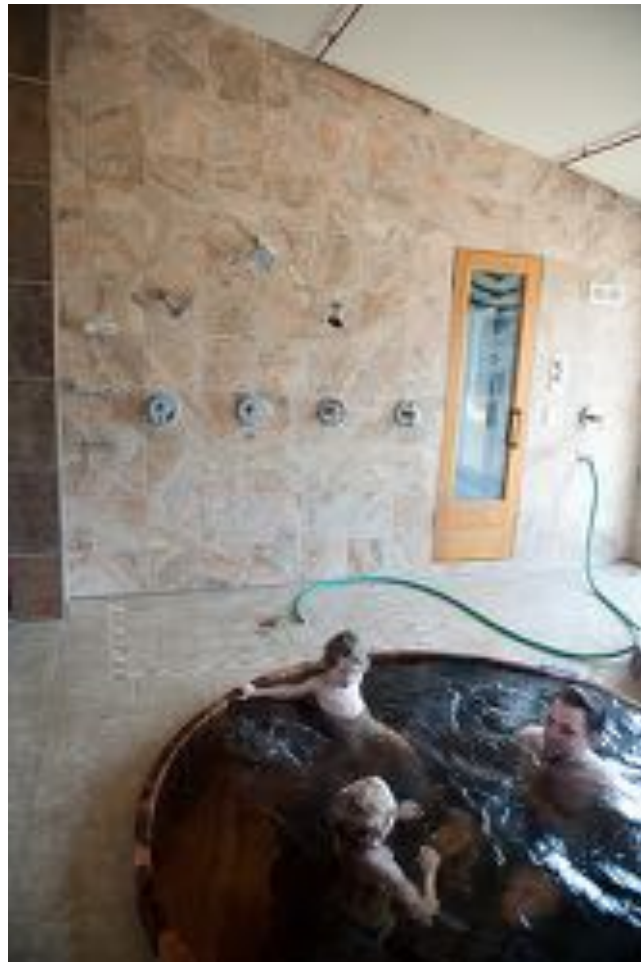
There's the spa room on the left and the dining room and kitchen on the right (the two guest bedrooms (each will have full-sized bunk beds and should cozily sleep 14)).



Standing at the sofa looking into the spa room.



Michael, Sylvia, and Andrew are trying out the hot tub.



Looking back from the spa room into the main house (Terry and Tom are relaxing on the sofa).



They're all big fans of the water!





Hope you enjoyed the tour! I'll leave you with a whole slew of pictures of Michael and Sylvia enjoying the hot tub and the overhead tub shower.















Bubs, you are an awesome Uncle! Thanks for giving Andrew and Sylvie such a good time:)





## Flowers for Earth Day (2011-04-22 13:37)

Happy Earth Day, my friends!

One of my favorite parts about my recent travels was having the opportunity to wander around taking photos of flowers. Before kids or dog or cats, plant photography held my heart. Here's some photos I took while exploring the neighborhoods near Joe's apartment in Washington DC.

Now that I'm back in nearly-frozen Wisconsin, these soft, bright flowers are all the more beautiful.

If you'd like to use any of these as your desktop background, click on the image, click on "View the photo on Flickr," click on the "actions" button above and to the left of the image, click on "view all sizes" (the 7th item on the list), choose either the "large" or "original" size, and download. Enjoy!

























### **Strep Throat (2011-04-23 11:23)**

Back in mid-December, I came down with a nasty case of strep. I was exhausted and my throat hurt so much that I wanted to remove my tonsils with scalpel.

Fast forward to yesterday. We'd just gotten back home from a week-long trip. The kids have been in Texas visiting Granny & Grandad, and I was in Arizona, Washington DC, and then one day in Dallas. We got home after midnight on Wednesday. On Thursday, I started the day feeling good...doing laundry, unpacking bags, beginning blog posts, but then I started to feel run down. My throat started hurting. I felt my will to live ebbing. So I took a nap. And then I oozed around the house, from couch to chair.

When I woke up this morning unable to talk because of my painful throat, I decided I should get it checked out. So I don't forget, here are my main symptoms of strep:

- Critically painful throat
- Fatigue.
- Decreased mental state where I am completely content watching terrible romantic movies or staring off into space rather than editing photos, writing blog posts, or even just surfing the web (all those activities seem way too taxing).
- No fever, but body shakes. And I feel like my internal thermostat is all out-of-wack.

When I went into Urgent Care this morning, the nurse did a throat culture and gasped when she saw my tonsils. "They are bleeding!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my goodness, that looks like it hurts!" Ahh, validation. Then when the doctor came in, he felt my tonsils and said, "Wow. Those are huge." After looking at them, he asked if I'd seen them. "No," I said. "You've gotta take a look at that," he said. So he gave me the flashlight thing and had me look in the mirror. Yup, pretty yucky - huge tonsils with white patches all over. In my enfeebled state, getting the sympathy of the doctors felt pretty good. Anyway, I'm on penicillin now, so hopefully that will have me feeling better by tomorrow.

All this talk of being sick makes me think of an old-time radio show that we oft-recited with Terry when I was growing up. It's called "Beat the Reaper" by the Firesign Theater. Deeply ingrained in my family-lore. Enjoy!

x

IFRAME: [http://www.youtube.com/embed/D3zZ\\_ih0Jpc?rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/embed/D3zZ_ih0Jpc?rel=0)

## **Arizona - Day 1 (2011-04-25 11:29)**

Over the last week, I've had the great pleasure of traveling across the country to visit with friends and family. The traveling was inspired by a plan to meet up with my friends Lara, Grace, Kathy, and Jennifer. We all went to graduate school together at the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan. Most of us were on a two-year project studying whether an exhibit at the Brookfield Zoo changed zoo visitor's behavior (here's the link to our research!). They're a great group of girls, and we've gotten together a few times in recent years. In October, 2007, we met up in Austin for a wonderful weekend (blog post here! photos here!). Some of us were also at Jennifer's 2008 wedding and Lara's 2010 wedding. Kathy bid on (and won) a weekend home rental in Scottsdale, Arizona, so we all traveled...from California (Jennifer and Kathy), Wisconsin (me), and Washington DC (Grace and Lara) to meet in Arizona for a girls weekend.





Enroute to Arizona, I dropped off Sylvia and Andrew at the Dallas airport. LuAnn was able to get through security to meet us at the gate, so I could wave goodbye and run across the airport to make my connecting flight. The kids stayed with Granny and Grandad for the week, since it was also Andrew's spring break.

In Arizona, the weather was warm...actually, often HOT! After the cold spring we've had in Wisconsin, I welcomed the hot sun:)

My girls and I love good food. It's the glue that held our master's project together through thick and thin. And so when we get together, food becomes a wonderful thing to anticipate and enjoy.

We started our visit of Scottsdale in Old Town. Upon the recommendation of a friend (thanks Becky!), we ate at a restaurant called Bandera. Rotisserie Chicken, here we come!



This picture, my friends, is of my favorite dish of the trip. It's called Macho Salad. Ingredients include chicken, avocado, corn, dates, goat cheese, almonds, and some amazing fried corn bread croutons. I found a recipe online that seemed to be a fair interpretation. Oh, so good!





April in Arizona is beautiful! This is my first time to the Southwest, and I was in awe of the flora and landscape.



Me and a silly statue in Old Town.



Check out the cactus! I'm now a huge fan of cactus. Such a cool plant!





One of many group pictures we took. Check out how the light spotlights Lara's baby belly:)



The next morning (I guess that was Friday), I woke up early and wandered around the yard taking pictures in the lovely morning light. Here's the sun shining through a palo verde tree.



And here's the huge house we occupied for the weekend.





Three saguaro cacti landscaped our front yard. Like the cactus equivalent to trees!



Lovely purple flowers blooming in the back.



Super cool bush.



Here's the pool...



Ahh, the morning light! I wish there was audio so you could hear the Gavin's Quail and Inca Doves. There were also Cactus Wrens pip-hopping about, and we saw some Flickrs nesting in the cacti.



Here's our first morning of breakfast. There was a lot of laughter and fun!





### **Arizona Day 2 - Botanic Gardens (2011-04-26 07:01)**

On the second day of our trip to Arizona, we visited the impressive Desert Botanical Garden. Since none of us are too familiar with the desert landscape, we were all really impressed at the diversity and beauty of the desert gardens.

As we approached the gardens, there were a mix of real yucca bushes/trees and glass ones made by the glass icon Dale Chihuly. Stunning!



The purplish prickly pear-looking cacti on the right of this picture were my favorite. Their colors ranged from deep mauve to a beautiful teal.





So cool! I think this photo was taken by Lara. I compiled all our images, so what you're seeing on the blog is a nice mix of photos by me and Lara and Kathy.



Who knows what this is...but isn't the symmetry beautiful?



April certainly is a month for blooms in the desert. And the contrast of the soft petals and the hard, baking rocks was stark.



Love how these caci seem to glow in the sun.



We enjoyed a visit to the butterfly exhibit.



Then I sat the girls down and asked them to let me take their pictures. I like this sequence of Jennifer:)















Lara's expecting a baby boy in early June, and it was so fun to talk about baby names and to watch her belly shift and bump as the little one rolled around.



Petrified cactus?



Jennifer stretching? Or perhaps imagining herself like a saguaro?





A few more pretty plants...











Here's me and Jennifer...and a saguaro







Here we're all pretending to be cacti.



Taking a moment in the shade. It was about 95 degrees, and that sun is hot! Amazing, though, how a few moments in the shade can revive.



Jennifer tries on some gourds.



This plant seems to say, "Don't mess with me."





Here's me and Lara...perhaps discussing some nerdy camera topic.



Another petrified cactus skeleton.



We tried to have lunch in Scottsdale at a restaurant called Cafe Monarch, but they were closing. The chef/owner sent us down the street to a great place ladies lunching spot called Arcadia Farms. There, we had another tremendously good meal.

Just because I loved it so much, I'll share the menu descriptions. We ordered these three items and shared. The salads came up as a favorite-meal-of-the-trip for some of us. The only thing that would have made it better is if the mushroom and cheese tart was a bit bigger:)

- Raspberry Salad with Fossil Creek Goat Cheese organically grown baby lettuces, fresh raspberries, warm goat cheese medallions, jicama, carrots, and candied pecans with our famous raspberry vinaigrette
- OUR SIGNATURE Strawberry Chicken Salad grilled chicken, vine-ripened strawberries, mixed baby greens toasted almonds and poppyseed vinaigrette
- Wild Mushroom, Spinach and Goat Cheese Tart caramelized leeks, fresh baby spinach, wild mushrooms, mozzarella and Fossil Creek goat cheese with organic baby greens

After lunch, we stopped by an REI where Kathy and I got some new summer clothes and Jennifer found a great pair of boots.

Back at the house, we made cool drinks and relaxed by or in the pool.



Here's Lara and her baby floating.



And here's my spot at the pool side Ahhh, memories!





After relaxing pool-side for the afternoon, we headed out to a restaurant called Pinnacle Peak Patio where they served ribs country-style.



Look at what cute footwear we have on! Jennifer found those boots on sale at REI earlier that day. And Kathy's red Dansko sandals are embroidered!



Being a cowboy kinda place, ties are not allowed. Hundreds of cut ties hang from the ceiling, and the floors are dusted with sawdust for dancing.



We shared orders of ribs and enjoyed their home brew root beer. This table reminds me of a place we went to in Austin and also to a place we went to in Boston when we ate lobster after presenting our research at an Environmental Education conferences. Red checked tablecloths often hold yummy food.



So ended Day 2. A fun-filled day with good friends.

### **Arizona Day 3 - Petroglyphs (2011-04-27 07:51)**

To start our third day in Arizona off right, Kathy treated us all to a delicious breakfast of huevos rancheros. Having never made them, I was in for a treat. They were positively delicious!



I believe the recipe goes something as follows: fry tortillas shells. Fry eggs. Pour beans over and top with salsa and



shredded cheese. Bake for 10 minutes on the plate. Yum!

Here we're enjoying another meal outdoors. Warm, soft air feels so good when you're used to the biting cold air of winter!



After breakfast, we attempted to go to a restorative yoga class. Unfortunately, traffic on the highway was completely stopped, and so by the time we got to our exit, we were already about 15 minutes late for the class. So we scrapped that idea and instead went to a nearby petroglyph site.



On this snake-infested hillside, there are thousands of stone drawings done by people 1-2000 years ago. The drawings were kind of hard to see in the bright mid-day sun, but it was really cool to see artwork made by people so very long ago.

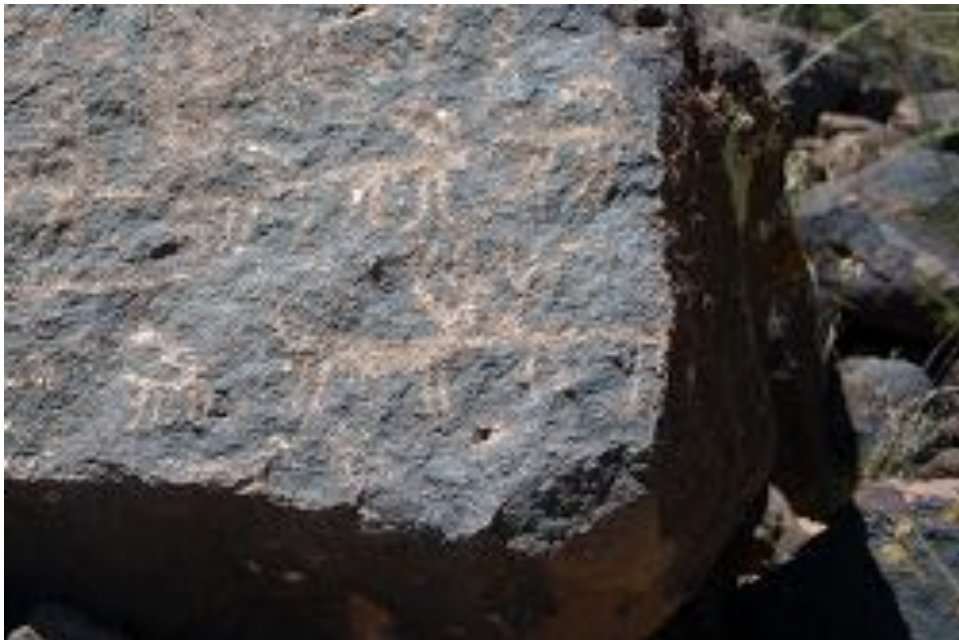


Here's one of the illustrations. To make these, the artist would use a rock to knock off the top layer of dark,

exposing the design.



Here are some petroglyphs of kissing reindeer. The five of us got stones with this design as our souvenir from the trip.



In the afternoon, some of us went to see Frank Lloyd Wright's Arizona home...but that's a topic for another blog post. After we all were home and had finished our pool-side or in-the-pool relaxation, we got dressed up and went out to supper at a great restaurant called The House at Secret Garden.







Here's a recreation of our Austin shoes picture.





I think this one here might be my favorite photo from the trip.



We had fun taking pictures together in the gardens around the restaurant before and after dinner.





Although we arrived in Scottsdale with little pre-planning for what we would do or where we would eat, we really lucked out finding some amazing restaurants. Thanks to my friend Indu who worked with Bryan in Ann Arbor and who now lives in Scottsdale for suggesting this restaurant.

I had Shrimp and Grits with Bacon and Carrots Drizzled with Sweet Corn and Serrano Sauce mmmm. For dessert, we shared a Chocolate Cloud Cake with House Made Fleur de Sel, Caramel and a Cloud of Sweetened Whipped Cream.









In the evening, we sat around the table, playing games and laughing until we cried. Good times, girls! Good times:)

### **Arizona Day 3 - Taliesin West (2011-04-28 07:12)**

Frank Lloyd Wright (whom I used to call Frank Lloyd Wrong when I was bored of him) was a regular topic when I was growing-up. Terry is heavily involved in the Taliesin Foundation...the organization that works to keep his homes in Wisconsin and Arizona afloat. As a kid, I recall many-a-visit to Wright's buildings in Chicago and Wisconsin. Terry was integral to the development of the original Frank Lloyd Opera that was created here in Madison in 1993 (review [here](#)). In fact, Terry came up with the name for the opera - Shining Brow (the Welsh translation for Taliesin) while lying on our couch at home. Wright thought that houses shouldn't be placed on the top of hills. Instead, they should blend with the brow of the hill to become one with the landscape.

Suffice to say, I'm pretty familiar with Wright's Taliesin home. For context/comparison, here's a few pictures I took of the Spring Green, Wisconsin Taliesin in July 2004.







Here's Mom (right) and Maretta (left) rolling down the hill:)



Frank Lloyd Wright lived in Wisconsin most of his life, and then he created a second house and studio in Arizona. Today, there is an accredited architecture school that migrates between the two locations in the winter and summer.

On Saturday afternoon, Grace, Kathy, Lara, and I visited Taliesin West and went on a tour. There were petroglyphs on one of the rocks in front of the buildings. One of the designs was turned into the Taliesin Architectural Fellowship logo - the thought it that it is like two hands clasped in fellowship.



Here, Kathy, Lara, Grace, and I head down into the gift shop to get ourselves some Wright-ian jewelry and gifts.



I love this design so much, I'd kinda like it to be the logo for my life:)



We had a great, enthusiastic tour guide who led us around the grounds and buildings for over an hour. The 15 degree angle was a distinguishing foundational design element throughout the site.





More petroglyphs.





This site is actually serviced by its own aquifer. Wright prioritized life's luxuries. In this case, the pool and grass also help to serve as a fire break since they were well outside of civilization when this structure was created.



The desert plants and elements blend with the hill behind.





Love this picture of Lara's belly!





This picture is looking out toward Phoenix.





Hello me!



Sun shining through the bell tower.



There are three theaters in Taliesin West. Here's a couple images of the first.







Outside, we spied an orange tree. As a midwestern girl, the idea of oranges growing on trees still makes my eyes grow large. Had to take a photo for proof.



In a sculpture garden, I liked this image of a woman running.



The Wisconsin Taliesin looks out over a lake and maple trees. Here we're looking out over saguaro cacti, palo verde trees, and desert. The view is beautiful both ways!



After the tour, we stopped for some ice cream in the shade. Glad we got to do this tour, girls!



**Arizona Day 4 - Sunrise over the desert (2011-04-29 07:03)**

One of my very favorite parts about our time in Arizona was watching the sunrise. On Sunday morning, we woke up just before 5am and headed out to Pinnacle Peak to watch the sun rise over the desert.

When we arrived, it was pitch dark, and we discovered that the park was still closed for a while.



The stars were bright, and we watched the dawn start to break in the east.



I loved the way the saguaro cacti were silhouetted and the bright stars (planets?) hung bright in the brightening sky.



From a deep blue to a rosier hue...





Turning around (and increasing my camera's exposure settings, you can see Pinnacle Peak warmed by the dawn light.



For a half hour or so, we hiked up the peak.





Here's a group photo taken by a passing photographer. By 6:15am, the trail was teeming with runners and photographers and hikers.



It seemed to me that darkness was peeled off the landscape like you slip the skin off a baked beet.



The rosy light brought out the deeply saturated colors of the cacti flowers.



Can you spot Waldo? (a.k.a. Grace and Jennifer).



I love this photo of a sprawling saguaro.



Lara is super-active-athletic woman. She wouldn't be sitting down on the trail if I hadn't asked her to:)





Jennifer teases the cacti.



We're all continuously amazed by the spikes.





Cactus and sunrise. If I did HDR photography, this would have been a great candidate as the sunrise was orange and this cactus is so cool-looking!



The soft morning light is so different from the blinding, harsh mid-day light. Gotta look fast before it's gone:)



Looking back at Pinnacle Peak as we left. That orangy-red sunrise really makes it glow.



As we walked out of the park, my friends engaged in some yoga moves:)



Love this one with the sun rising over Grace's triangle pose.



Beautiful flowers.



And here are a few final shots of the desert sunrise. All taken by Lara.







Bye bye, desert! Here's a photo of our vacation home just before leaving...



After packing up, we drove in to Phoenix for breakfast at Matt's Big Breakfast. It's the kind diner that ends up with a line around the block every weekend morning. Fortunately, we got there early enough that we only had a 40 minute wait:) I enjoyed a mushroom, sausage, and cheese omelet with home made lemonade. And I didn't eat again until dinner:)

We headed back to the airport, and I caught a couple on-time flights from Phoenix through Dallas and then on to Washington DC, where I spent Part II of my vacation. Stay tuned...

### **Washington DC - Visiting and strolling (2011-04-30 07:43)**

I arrived in DC late on Sunday night. Joe met me at the airport, and we took the Metro back to his apartment. He's living in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, within walking distance to the Capitol. In the map below, Joe's home is the red marker, and the capitol building is surrounded by green on the left (click for a larger version).



So neat to get to see Joe's home. His first post-college digs.



Joe is a research associate with a non-profit called Taxpayers for Common Sense. His organization is a non-partisan budget watchdog group, and Joe's been focusing on energy and natural resources policy. Here's an example of a write-up he's done:)



Joe lives with two roommates from Bowdoin. One is working for a public polling firm and the other for the Justice Department. Thanks for making me feel welcome, guys!

On Monday, Joe headed in to work, and I wandered around his beautiful neighborhood, photographing the flowers and the houses.



I already posted many of the photos from my walk-about on Earth Day. You can see them [here](#).





Here's Joe's apartment building.



Their place is on the second floor. They have a two-story high ceiling in the living room, two bedrooms upstairs, and



one bedroom downstairs. Joe and his roommates are about the cleanest 20-somethings I've ever met!



Looking down the street. The flowers and beautiful trees help, but I kept thinking about what an amazingly beautiful place they live. There were kids playing in yards and people out gardening as I walked around. I didn't know that areas so close to the Capitol and Mall could be so very residential!



I joined Joe for a yummy lunch of empanadas and tamales along with a great drink called Horchata.

Here I'm in the Eastern Market metro stop - being a tourist, taking pictures.





Here comes a train!



I emerged from the Metro at the Smithsonian stop. First, I headed down to the Holocaust Museum. Unfortunately, the permanent exhibition was sold out for the day. I was, however, quite moved by two of the special exhibits - one on the power of Nazi propaganda and one called Remember the Children.



From the Holocaust Museum, I walked across the Mall over to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. Pregnant-with-twins-Heather was at a conference, and I was planning to meet her at the end of her work day. That, however, is a topic for another blog post or two.





Here come the silly Segways (tour info here)!





How luxuriant to wonder around a beautiful town and photograph or do whatever strikes my fancy!



Since it was spring break (the week before Easter too), the Mall was teeming with school groups. It was actually quite remarkable to me how many people were pouring in and out of the museums.



\*\*\*

24 hours later...

Tuesday afternoon, Grace treated Joe and me to a wonderful tea at the Wilard Hotel.



I enjoyed the Wilard tea blend along with the following. Is there no better idea than afternoon tea? What a divine way to spend some of the afternoon. Especially when it's with good friends:)

*Choice of Tea*  
 +  
*Lemon Madeleine Cake*  
 +  
*Sandwiches*  
 EGG SALAD  
 CELERY HEARTS ON SEVEN GRAIN  
 SMOKED MAPLE SALMON  
 QUAIL EGG ON PUMPERNICKEL  
 GOAT CHEESE PARFAIT  
 FENNEL SEED & RYE APRICOT ON BRIOCHE  
 CUCUMBER, CREAM CHEESE & TOMATO  
 SERVED ON COUNTRY BREAD  
 SMOKED TURKEY SALAD  
 CRANBERRIES, PINE NUTS & SAGE ON WHOLE WHEAT  
 +  
*Scones*  
 CRANBERRY ORANGE & GINGER SCONES  
 APRICOT & RASPBERRY MARMALADES  
 LEMON CURD & DEVONSHIRE CREAM  
 +  
*Pastries*  
 MINI RASPBERRY CHEESECAKE TARTLET  
 HONEY & ROSE MARSHMALLOW  
 BITTERSWEET CHOCOLATE MOUSSE  
 WITH PASSION FRUIT GILIE  
 APRICOT ALMOND BUTTER COOKIE  
 +

Here's Grace and me before parting ways. We're going to see her in July when she and Tim and John come out to visit. Already, I can't wait!



One thing I missed doing was trying a Nutella latte. Ahh, well, maybe next time. The coffee shop, Pound, serves a specially concocted Nutella latte with Kickapoo Coffee (from Viroqua, WI)! They are just a few doors down from Joe's office at Taxpayers for Common Sense.



Here's me and Joe the morning of my departure. First a couple out takes and then the nice picture.









Thanks Joe, Joe's roommates, and Grace for such a nice time!

## 7.5 May

### Washington DC - Smithsonian Museum of Natural History (2011-05-01 07:45)

While I was in Washington DC, I once again visited the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. Heather's post-doctoral work has been with the Smithsonian Center for Conservation and Evolutionary Genetics, and she's had offices at both the Natural History Museum and at the National Zoo.

There was a long, long line to get into the zoo.



It was fun to photograph some of the exhibits, knowing that Andrew and Sylvia would enjoy seeing them when I got home.



The oceans exhibit is simply stunning.





I really enjoyed a new exhibit where people have crocheted a coral reef. Fascinating conflagration of fiber arts, mathematics, and marine biology (to name a few).



THE  
HYPERBOLIC CROCHET  
**CORAL REEF**  
BY THE INSTITUTE FOR FIGURING

CREATED AND CURATED BY  
MARGARET AND CHRISTINE WERTHEIM

**CORAL REEF CRAFTERS**

The pieces in the seven enclosed cases on display here have been made by a "core" group of people around the world working with the Institute For Figuring in Los Angeles.

David Simons (USA), Evelyn Hadden (UK), Anna Meyer (USA), Helen Morrison (Australia),  
Marlene Knapik (USA), Barbara Wertheim (Australia), Miki Bergstein (Australia),  
Julia Steele (USA), Heather McCormick (USA), Di Red (USA), Nancy Lewis (UK),  
Anita Manning (USA), Stan Fender (USA), Vonda H. McIntyre (USA), Susan O'Brien (USA),  
Rebecca Frazier (USA), Claire O'Callaghan (USA), Eleanor Kent (USA), Kathleen Gault (USA),  
Aida Alier (USA), Nadia Slavova (USA), Ariane Mouton (USA), AJ Sobran (USA),  
Renee Shiao (USA), Aida Bruce (USA), Maki Fujihara (USA)

with

Ann Wolcott, Elizabeth Wertheim, Rita Demari, Quinn  
Catherine Chrysler, Cary Cole, Peta Conroy, Melissa Brando, Emily Bennett, Sophie Hain,  
Zoe Glick, Clara Gomez, Daphne Hinkle, Rebecca Van Dusen, Nina Anglin, Lynn Galt,  
Lisa Chappin, Rosa Marzotto, Polly Rosen, Tracy Sells, Beverly Di Nola, Jean Gault,  
Evelyn Gault, Jennifer Hahn, Susan Wenzel, Terry Longman, Anita Carroon, Audrey Green,  
Evelyn Farkas, Lisa Green, Joanne DeGroot, Jennifer Byrne, Madge Perry, Maria Johns,  
Dale Brown, Susan Davis, Lisa Morrison, Elizabeth Cooper, Susan Arpentine, Suzanne







One of the women who spearheads this hyperbolic coral reef project gave a TED talk. So very interesting!

[EMBED] This totem really caught my eye...





Since Andrew and Sylvie weren't with me, I got to visit the gem and mineral exhibits this time. I was surprised to see a large concretion on display.







In Wisconsin, on Highway 14, just outside of Arena, I once visited a bizarre concretion museum (see article here). The rocks were no where near the size of this beauty, but it was an interesting thing to discover it here! One of the exhibits I enjoyed most was a Nature's Best Photography Awards. The following images were displayed in huge wall prints. It was humbling and inspiring and invigorating to see some of the amazing scenes nature photographers have captured. And I so enjoyed the fact that I was by myself, so I could wander the exhibit at my leisure. I met up with Heather at the end of her work day. She's due with twins - a boy and a girl in about six weeks. Amazing! So fun to see her:) She and Michael have had a rather extraordinary last few months. In addition to the twins pregnancy and life with their now-three-year-old, Evie, they both secured tenure-track professorships at a liberal arts college in Indiana. So starting in August, Professors Heather and Michael will be heading to Richmond, Indiana (that's on the south east border of Indiana, about 7 1/2 hours from Madison). Heather will be the school's natural history museum director where she'll be:

- managing the museum's collections,
- raising funds for continuous museum improvements,
- maintaining an active research career involving undergraduates,
- supervising student workers at the museum,
- teaching one course per year, and
- providing educational experiences for students both on campus and in the Richmond community.

(that's according to the job description I found online) Michael will be working as a half-time professor in the Physics Department. He'll be teaching one class this fall and one in the spring, and his job should grow and perhaps expand in future years. Evie may be attending the on-campus preschool, and their dog Pippin should get to go into work with them! So many congrats to the Drs. Lerner for this major accomplishment. Looking forward to visiting you guys in Indiana!

### Washington DC - Heather, Michael, & Evelyn (2011-05-02 07:51)

I was so glad to get the opportunity to spend an evening with Heather and Michael and Evelyn! The timing of my trip happened to coincide with a conference Heather was attending, and it seemed at first that we were only going to get to wave at each other for a moment during my time in DC. However, her Monday evening freed up, and after meeting up with her at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum, we drove back to her home in Takoma Park. From there, we took her pooch, Pippin, for a walk by Sligo Creek.

I, of course, brought my camera. And I captured some fun images of her in this blooming, anticipating time. She's got two babies in that belly - a boy and a girl. They're growing healthy and big. She's 32 weeks now, so she's got 6 more weeks to go!



View from above...



Pippin was enjoying playing fetch with his stick.



Such an intent, energetic dog:)



Heather amidst the pink dogwood blossoms.







Evie's birthday was coming up (it's April 23rd), and here she's dialing her placemat to tell her how many days are left until her special day.



Heather and Michael are part of a dinner co-op with several other families. On Mondays, they deliver dinner to the other families, and other nights of the week, dinner is delivered to them. It's been going strong for a couple years now! Tonight was their night to cook, and they made up a delicious verde chicken dish. When we were done eating, we slipped into the back yard to get some family photos before the sun set.



Love this one of my friends!



Here's what Evie did when I asked her to go give her mom a hug and then to turn around to look at me. Silly chicken!





Joe was throwing the frisbee for Pippin, which kept him happy as a clam. He's sure to miss these guys when they move to Indiana this summer!



Evie - still Two but almost Three - running in her yard.



Silly dog looking for his sick.



Evie's view from the slide.





She's just about the most angelic little girl I've ever seen. Her eyes are so wide and knowing, it's amazing.





Those babies are moving in there!



It's so wonderful to see dear friends living their dreams. They've experienced such sadness with the loss of their son Allan. And that doesn't really go away. With a beautiful daughter, new jobs and a greatly expanding family, Heather and Michael are zooming toward a bright, rich unknown.



### **Washington DC - Tour of the West Wing (2011-05-03 07:13)**

A friend of mine from high school 4H Drama Company works for President Obama. I haven't seen Missy (now more dignified known as Melissa) since we were about 16. So that's like 17 years. Thanks to Facebook, we reconnected last year. She had lunch with Joe when he first came to DC, and on Tuesday night, Joe invited her over for supper. She in turn, invited us on a tour of the West Wing of the White House. Holy cow, YES! So after a great evening spent reconnecting, we drove downtown, went through multiple layers of security, and got to peer around the halls where our country is run.

Here's a little background on the West Wing (source site):

President Theodore Roosevelt had a "temporary" office building constructed in 1902 to separate his office from the living quarters, where his wife and six children lived. Until then, what is now the Treaty Room on the second floor of the White House was at various times the Cabinet Room or the President's Office.

Following a Christmas Eve fire in 1929, renovations and restoration displaced Herbert Hoover for several months while new and improved facilities were built. In 1934 the Oval Office was moved to its current location on the southeast corner, over-looking the Rose Garden. In the 1940's, the building became known as the "West Wing."

We entered the West Wing on the ground floor through the foyer on the west.



No photography was allowed in the West Wing, so in order to give you a visual tour, I'm using photos found elsewhere (click on the images to see their home). In most cases, things the rooms look just like we saw them...with the major exception that there were not heads of state working while we were touring!

After going through a final level of security, we got to walk through the lobby (shown here with Pres. Obama, 2218

who was not in fact in the building when we were visiting).



We took a peek into the Navy Mess, saw the door to the Situation Room, and headed past the photo offices to the stairwell to the second floor.





From the White House Mueum website

While we saw the door to the Situation Room, the tour didn't extend there. However, I found a nice video tour if you're interested!

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7ch13ZuMu8&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7ch13ZuMu8&feature=player_embedded)

The walls are bedecked with photos of the president by the amazing photojournalist Pete Souza. You can see many of these images on the White House Flickr stream. What I wouldn't give to work with and learn from Mr. Souza! I'm amazed at the crispness with which he can capture emotion and connections on the fly. Speaking of which, I also admire photographer Callie Shell, who photographed Obama in the days leading up to the 2008 election.

Here's a picture showing the stairway with similar photos from Pres. Bush's term.





On the second floor (click for a larger version), we came up the stairs just to the west of the Cabinet Room.



From there, we walked down the short hallway and looked into the Cabinet Room.

Here's a video about the Cabinet room. It was so cool to stand in that hall and know that people with such huge decision making powers have stood and sat right there.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxSvi6JCCfk>

A few steps more, and we were gazing into the real Oval Office. It was lit by cove lighting rimming the ceiling, and the effect was one of amazing brightness...almost like it was daylight. This room, full of such history, really took my breath away.

The Resolute Desk

"Every president since Hayes, except Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford has used the desk. It was a present from Queen Victoria to President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1880 and was built from the timbers of the Resolute - a British Navy sailing ship."



"In August 2010, the Oval Office was refurbished for President Obama with striped wallpaper, new sofas, and a mica-clad coffee table. An oval rug features the presidential seal and historical quotes of meaning to President Obama around the border."



Norman Rockwell's painting Statue of Liberty and Frederic Remington's sculpture Bronco Buster which sit to the right of the president's desk. The table behind the President's desk is filled with family photos.

x

The ceiling is itself a lovely work of art, and features elements of the Seal of the President.



To the left, you can see the Childe Hassam painting Avenue in the Rain (1917) is part of the White House's own collection, donated during the Kennedy administration.



We were peeking in the room through the door shown on the left. The door on the right leads to the President's secretary and then back to the Cabinet Room. Above the fire place hangs a portrait of George Washington. On the tables on the back left and right are busts of Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln.

Instead of a vase of flowers, Pres. Obama has decided to keep a bowl of apples.





Here's a little online tour I found of the Oval Office.

[http://youtu.be/fH89\\_pJerr0](http://youtu.be/fH89_pJerr0)

Directly across the hallway from the Oval Office is the Roosevelt Room. Since the Cabinet Room is only used for meeting of the Cabinet, the Roosevelt Room is used for most other larger meetings. We stood where this photo was taken. The flags represent (from left to right) the USA, the Office of the President, and then the different branches of the military in order of when they were created. The banners on each flag indicate how many theaters of war each military branch has been in.



And another view. The door to the right leads to the corridor looking at the Oval Office.



Down the hall to the lobby is a large, three-part Norman Rockwell painting called So You Want to See the President from 1943. So detailed and fascinating!

Then we got to look around the main lobby. Neat to think of all the people who have passed through that way. One thing that made my heart my heart go pitter pat was learning that George Clooney has sat in this lobby. Be still my shaky knees!

x

Here we're exiting out the main lobby doors. This is probably where most high-clearance personnel enter the West Wing.



Just outside the foyer shown above, we posed for some photos (since we were now in a photography-approved zone). Here's me and Joe.



And here's my friend and our guide, Melissa!



After touring the West Wing, Missy took us to see her office in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.





It was about 10pm by this time...



Here's the sign on her door.



And here's the girl herself, hard at work. She runs the White House Intern program, and it sounds like it's a great job that requires some kinda crazy hours:)



Missy, thank you for this incredible experience. More than that the tour, though, I'm just glad to have had the opportunity to spend a little time together again. Birthday Buddy, you're one fun and cool person. Cheers to you!

### **Hanging in Dallas (2011-05-04 07:59)**

The plan was to pick up the kids at the airport on Wednesday and then to fly back to Madison. That was the plan. Didn't quite work out that way, though.

On Wednesday, I flew in to Dallas from DC, and LuAnn drove the kids up to Dallas from College Station. It was so fun to greet them at our gate! Being apart from them for a week got me to a place where I really kinda missed them. It's nice to be apart sometimes so you appreciate when you're together:)

Here were a few photos I took before we got on the plane to fly to Madison.



Siblings mugging for the camera. Sylvia loves looking at this sequence.







Our flight was delayed almost an hour (pilot was missing), so we headed over to the kids area to play.





Andrew's walking the plank.



After we got on the plane, we waited another 45 minutes, and then they pulled us off and canceled the flight because a co-pilot couldn't be found.

I scrambled a little, got vouchers for meals and hotel, checked in with Melanie (who lives north of Dallas) and my uncle and aunt (who also live north of Dallas). We got a rental car, and drove up to Plano where we enjoyed supper and some evening dress-up time at Kirk and Sue's house. Kirk hadn't seen Andrew since he was a baby, and Sue had never met either of them. The kids were mighty smitten with Kirk and Sue's generosity. They loved playing King and Queen (or Princess) after dressing up in Aunt Sue's costume jewelry and scarves.







Sue put together some treat bags for the kids to take home, and we dolled out the candy over the course of our long flight home the next day. Andrew noted several times after our visit how much he enjoyed talking with Kirk and Sue. Thanks, guys, for putting us up for the night on such short notice. It was a lot of fun to spend the evening together.

#### **Andrew's aquarium photographs (2011-05-05 07:02)**

On Thursday morning, we visited the Dallas aquarium. Andrew really wanted to take pictures, so (while keeping the strap around my neck, and after setting the exposure for him), I let him take the following pictures.

Here's a very active anaconda.





Andrew decided to take pictures of Sylvia yelling. She's in the midst of a long, mid-level tantrum. Fortunately, the aquarium was so loud, few people noticed.



Oh, so sad! Good focusing, Andrew!



Here's Andrew's picture of the manatees.



And here's his picture of a giant crab. This thing was about the size of Sylvia!



One last one...I didn't get to adjust the exposure on this one for him. The incredible Mundo Maya shark and ray tunnel.



Pretty cool that my boy is interested in taking photos! Maybe I'll set him up with my point and shoot and we can go on photo safaris together soon:)

Oh, and FYI there are web cams of the manatees and the incredible leafy sea horses here.

## Dallas - Aquarium and visit with Melanie (2011-05-06 07:04)

We've come to the last post in this somewhat epic spring vacation blog posting extravaganza. While I'll be publishing them one-a-day over the next weeks, I've written all 12 in one day. A day that involved me sitting on the sofa for about 12 hours. I'm nursing my sore throat and my woozy head. Step, strep, be gone!

But you're reading this sometime in May, and hopefully we are all healthy again.

This was my second visit to the Dallas World Aquarium. My first was with Bryan back in December 2009 (post and photos here). On Thursday morning, we packed up our things at Kirk and Sue's house and took our rental car (a very snazzy red Chevy Cruze) to the train station where we caught the DART downtown. The kids really enjoyed being on the train. What an adventure! When we got to the aquarium, Sylvia wanted to see the sloth and Andrew wanted to see the toucans.

Here's the sleepy sloth.





And here they got to feed the toucans blueberries!



Unfortunately, the stopping of the blueberry feeding resulted in a 20 minute tantrum from my dear daughter.

Eventually, I walked away and photographed this giant otter.





Andrew helped her recover (holding her face in his hands and trying to make her laugh). And off we headed to check out more wildlife. Here, the kids are checking out some big lizards.



This aquarium is incredible. It's as much a zoo as an aquarium, and I love how their exhibits have you wander through ecosystems. Makes it feel like you're in the jungle as the birds fly over head.



My favorite creature of the trip was this octopus, who was swimming/crawling across the tank. Seeing all those  
2248

suckers work in harmony was really quite stunning!



Due to more tantruming, we made a quick exit from the aquarium and caught the train back up to Plano. From there, we drove up to Frisco, where we got to see Melanie's Curves in its new location.

Andrew was having a blast using the stretching apparatus as a jungle gym.





Here's Mel at her Curves!







The kids wanted to have lunch at Indian Buffet, so Melanie directed us to one nearby. After stuffing ourselves (is it possible to not stuff one's self at an Indian Buffet?), we headed over to a great playground before we needed to zip back to the airport to return the rental car and catch our 5:30pm flight.

The kids got some good pre-traveling running around time.



More importantly, we all got a little more play-with-Melanie time!









The kids sure did like this tire swing!











The rental car got returned without a hitch, but our flights were delayed. It looked somewhat unlikely that we'd make our connection in Chicago, but we did! The flight out of Chicago was actually delayed for an hour or so, but the kids did wonderfully. They played London Bridges and Ring Around the Rosie and a little small-space tag. Andrew read to Sylvia, we dolled out the candy from Kirk and Sue, and everyone stayed happy.

And when we got home, Bryan and Terry met us at the airport! It felt so nice to be home again:) Sylvia's bag had a rather fatal mishap in the valet check, but nothing besides the bag itself was damaged.



What a lot of great visiting! The kitties are happy to have me home again. And I'm so glad to have all these photos and memories of my trip. Thanks to Granny and Grandad for taking the kids for the week so I could play! Glad to be back home with my husband and kiddos again:)

#### **Easter preparations (2011-05-07 07:13)**

We returned home from Dallas-and-other-adventures on Thursday night - late. Sylvia's pink roller bag was mangled in the valet check, but other than that, we were all safe and sound and happy to be back together again. Here's a photo of Bryan reading to the kids. Note that Sylvie is wearing a swimming suit over her footie pajamas. Always adding a little flair, that girl:)





So nice to wake up and snuggle in Daddy's arms.



On Friday afternoon, I started coming down with what turned out to be strep throat. I was woozie and exhausted and achy. Bryan took off Friday afternoon to spend some time with us, and I ended up napping. Then on Saturday morning, I went to Urgent Care for a throat culture and started on antibiotics. While I lay on the couch for 14 hours, Bryan played with the kids. He took them to Kids in the Rotunda to see David Landau; afterwards they went to Indian Buffet. After coming home, they started dying Easter eggs. I staggered forth from my couch-home to photograph the proceedings before re-collapsing in a horizontal position.





I love the colors and the delight of dying eggs. We got a glitter kit this year, so now many of our hard boiled eggs have a fine, sparkly coating. I'm sure it's edible...



Here's Sylvie looking a bit too long for her toddler bed. She loses her blankets almost every night, so I switched her to twin-sized sheets and blankets so they tuck in more fully at the bottom. Seems to help with the middle of the night, "MOOOOMMMM, DAAAADD! BLANKETS!! BLANKETS!!!" issue.





Aaak. the toes. Be still my heart. Sweetness:)



**Easter morning (2011-05-08 07:18)**

On Easter-eve, Bryan headed out to acquire some munchies for the Easter baskets. I'd some some shopping (for bunny ears, etc. last month one night when I had a shopping urge, and good thing too as I was so sick on Saturday).

Here's Andrew-the-rabbit.



We kept it pretty simple, with a few jelly beans, some M &Ms, and some (yum) Cadburry mini-eggs (I ate most of the kids mini-eggs when they weren't looking. Mom prerogative.).



Over the years (all the way back to college), my aunt Kate has sent lots of Easter critters. We've got singing ducks and big bunnies and more ducks and more bunnies. Sylvie and Andrew had fun playing with them all this Easter. And I turned my winter tree into a spring tree. I spray painted it white and hung felt eggs from its branches. Cute:)



While it was pretty chilly, we had fun running around in the yard looking for Easter eggs. Andrew was so thoughtful about making sure that Sylvie got the same number that he had. What a sweet brother!



Sylvie samples the contents of the eggs.





Two bunnies go a-hiking.





The cuteness is unbearable. And can I just say how much I l.o.v.e. my camera?!



Sylvie seeking out more eggs. One is still missing. Maybe the bunnies found it:)



Andrew and Sylvia on Easter morn. Those little people make my heart sing.



Run kids, run!



Spring is coming after all! The daffodils are blooming:)



Time to head inside to warm up. These guys did a great job hunting for eggs. What a fun thing to do together:)



### **Happy Mother's Day! (2011-05-08 10:58)**

I'm at Jack's house for the spring wildflower weekend. Photos from our visit are uploaded (making the visit official and true).

Last night, Jack shared a hilarious essay. I read it and laughed so hard I couldn't breathe. Then I found a video of the author, Ian Fraizer, reading it out loud, and I laughed until my belly ached. Tears. Tears of mirth. Ahh, good stuff.

So to all you mothers, parents, or people who have been near children, enjoy. And happy mother's day!

Laws Concerning Food and Drink; Household Principles; Lamentations of the Father by Ian Fraizer (written version here)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNrQFgWcCd0>

PS. My favorite parts were "Laws pertaining to dessert" and "On screaming"



**Family pics and Easter brunch (2011-05-09 07:19)**

On Easter morning, we headed over to Terry's to have brunch at the Madison Club with Terry, Tom, and Terry's neighbor Connie. Since we were all looking spiffy, we thought we'd take a few family pictures.

I love these pictures of Andrew and me!





Nice family portrait.



Silly family portrait. Why is it that the silly appeals to me so much more?



I love Andrew' expression in this next one. And I like that he and I are looking at the camera while Bryan and Sylvie aren't.



Here's Connie's dog, Leena. She just had some major surgery a couple weeks ago after breaking her hip. Sylvia loves Leena.





Last time we were at the Madison Club for Easter brunch was in 2006. Mareta and Kyle had just gotten engaged, and Andrew was a mere 9 months old. Here's Andrew with his first Easter bunny. A little creepy, if you ask me!





Michael entertains a not-quite-crawling baby boy.



Now here we are in 2011...

Andrew's being silly with Tom.





Love the bouquet of blooms on our table!



Miss Sylv did a good job at brunch. It's so nice to be able to take the kids places and have it go smoothly. A three- and five-year old are so much easier than a two- and four-year old!



Here's our brunch crew...



Back at Terry's I pulled out the camera again. This time I got a portrait of Tom,





and one of Connie with Leena.





Andrew and his dad...



Sylvie loves to wear Mareta's red shoes that Terry keeps in his guest room. She races to put them on as soon as we come over.



Here she's modeling her favorite footwear.



Rocking the twist:)



Stuffed and happy, we headed home to rest for a bit before going out on an afternoon hike. Happy Easter, all!

### **The coming of spring - Easter hike (2011-05-10 07:22)**

I'd only been on antibiotics for a day, but those magic pills made such a difference! While I still had some signs of strep - a very sore throat, but the dizzy, achy, sick feeling had pretty much gone away. I was happy and relieved to be able to join in the Easter Day activities:)

After we got home from Terry's we played outside for a while. Sylvie's loving her trike.



Spooky and Bowser are enjoying a breath of fresh air. Bowser's weight is up to 9.5 lbs, so he's no longer emaciated and dropping. They still are eating some very expensive hypoallergenic food (rabbit), but other than that, he's also off his extensive meds. Hope he's better...whatever it was that was causing the problem!



Sylvie brought some of the eggs outside and was having fun re-hiding them.



Cute girl!





In the afternoon, we headed out to Cherokee Marsh. We decided to see if we could find any dragons. Little, friendly dragons, not much bigger than a bird. Andrew brought along his bug catcher net for dragon catching.



Activity 1: jumping off a stump.



Big 'ole Andrew strong and brave.



Kids skipping toward the water, hoping perhaps to find a water dragon. Would they be blue? Better look hard, they'll flash by before you can see!





Hmm, what do you think scratched away at this tree trunk? A deer? A beaver? A dragon?



I love this picture! Two kids, exploring the world.





Cherokee Marsh in April. Bryan has been kayaking around here and really enjoys it.



Kids running down a forest path in the spring.



Some spring ephemerals are blooming. Anyone know what this one is? Anne?



Moss and fresh leaves. Sylvie stopped in her tracks when she saw this bright patch of beautiful moss.



Girl in the woods.





Heading down the hill. I was happy we didn't run into any ticks on this outing. Or maybe Bryan did find one. But no ticks that dug in...



The spring peepers (teeny tiny frogs...see a photo and hear their song here) were peeping their hearts out in a pond. The noise was like a roar. We sat for a long time on the board walk, listening for the peepers and looking for a glimpse of one.



Sylvie was quite amused by using sticks to dig around in the water for dead vegetation.



Andrew, meanwhile, used his bug/dragon catching net as a pond scum catcher.





A Canada Goose was nesting nearby. Bryan's pointing it out to Sylvie.



Not much better than spending time outdoors together as a family.



No dragons were found on this trip (although Andrew thought he saw a flash of shimmering gold). We'll try again soon...

Before getting back into the cars, we did the obligatory playtime on the big rocks by the parking lot.



Brown-eyed Andrew



I was admiring Andrew's beautiful baby teeth (I don't tell him they are baby teeth, or he would probably not be too pleased). Not too long, and he'll have one, two, four, eight big teeth filling that little mouth. I treasure his sweet five-year-old smile.



He thought he could stop me from tickling and photographing him. Nope!





So glad I have these images of my little boy filled with mirth!



### **Freeze powder (2011-05-11 09:38)**

My mom used to say that the baby gift she most wanted to give to new parents is a little vial of "freeze powder." So at those times when life is so sweet that it almost hurts, you can freeze the passing of time and just keep those little babies their current age for an indefinite period of time. I would have frozen my babes at around 7 or nine months. And I would most definitely freeze them right now.

Spring has finally finally come to Wisconsin. We went from weather in the 50s to weather in the high 80s. The grass is green. Our yard is a carpet of violets. The cherry and magnolia trees are a profusion of pink. The maple trees are transitioning from their sprigs of light green flowers to their tiny, bright green leaves. I pulled our hammock out of storage yesterday and curled up on it in the afternoon with a couple girls...reading stories and swaying in the soft breeze.

So I'd like to freeze May for at least a couple months. More than that, though, I'd like to freeze Andrew and Sylvia right here at 3 and 3/12 years old and at 5 and 10/12 years old. While we certainly have moments of angst, sadness, and hair-rending, in general, these two kids are sweet beyond belief. They're playing together with energy and delight. I wake up to the sound of their collective giggling. I have to pull Andrew out of Sylvia's room at night, because he snuck in "just to read her one last book."

Andrew is so inquisitive and smart. It's a true delight to explore the world with him. Sylvia is in an emotional place of increased stability and calm. She's delightful and conversational. I love the way her limbs fold up on my lap. I



love the way her breath smells and that when her tears fall think and hot down her cheeks, I can make things better. I love her sense of style, the way she spins and jumps and shrieks with mirth. From this vantage point, I feel grateful for the sometimes-trials of parenting as I feel an inner expansiveness borne through the combustion that can be children.

I've assembled a collection of some of my favorite images of the kids below. So many adorable moments in just the last few weeks.

Maybe that's one of the reasons I like photography so much. Since freeze powder is in short supply, these images we take and share and hold are our best alternative.

Thanks to Jessica for taking these pics of me and Sylv.







I feel so lucky that I can be at home with the kids and spend many sweet hours in their company. Enjoy some little Dotzour silliness.

























flickr



This photo is no longer available



**Pinocchio. Puh puh puh (2011-05-12 07:24)**

Sylvia's last day of Toddler Time at Monona Grove Nursery School was a couple weeks ago. The next time she'll be back in school will be next fall. She's so excited to think that she'll be going to school "All by herself. With no Mommy!"

Here are Sylvie and Celia with Patrice, their Thursday Toddler Time teacher on the last day of class. Patrice is awesome. If you have a 0-5 year old in Madison, I highly, highly recommend Monona Grove Nursery School:)



I didn't bring my camera to to our other class, but Sylvia and I both also really enjoyed Toddler Time with Diana. Next year, dear Linda will be teaching Toddler Time along with Patrice. And Sylvie will be in preschool on Thursday and Friday mornings with Sue and Jodi!

On to other news...about Sylvia and her letters. In general, my girl marches to her own drum. The beating of her drum doesn't include much about letters, numbers, categorizing things, or puzzles. She loves to be read to, and she loves to read to herself (yay!), yet she is completely oblivious to letters. I've been pointing out every "S" for Sylvia that I see for months, and she doesn't seem to care one bit. "A" - who cares? "O" like a circle...nope.

My sense is that she could learn her letters but that it just isn't interesting to her. So I spent a few weeks mulling over how to best approach this situation. I'm sure she'll learn her letters by the time she's six...there's nothing critical about early adoption of letter learning. In fact, I'd rather she play and imagine and read herself stories and run through the grass rather than work on letter-learning. Yet, I can't help but feel like if I find the right things, it might spark her interest and she might take off on a grand exploration of sounds and letters and words. What's a parent to do?

Along the same lines, I was noting that Sylvie doesn't have much interest in activities like puzzles. So I don't tend to do puzzles. But perhaps I should pull them out sometimes just to encourage well-rounded-ness. I think maybe I'll make a point of doing some block-building and puzzle-doing and see if she sometimes wants to join in.

Back to letters - I thought about following the Montessori methods of making letters out of different textiles - like sandpaper - to help with learning. But I have a sneaking suspicion that those wouldn't spark her interest either. I started thinking about this LeapFrog toy I've seen at friends' houses that allows kids to spell out words.

And then I had a crisis of conscious.

We don't do battery-operated toys. I definitely don't do educational battery operated toys. No talking toys, no singing toys, no lights-flashing/noise-making toys. And somehow I lucked out, and everyone in our gift-giving circle either espouses the same values or is super-respectful of my inclinations. Our non-battery operated toys require imagination and creativity. The child brings their ideas and spirit to the toy to play rather than looking to the toy to entertain them.

However, Mom always said, "Moderation in everything, including moderation." I was eying this LeapFrog singing, talking toy because I thought it might spark Sylvia's interest in letters and sounds. And you know what, it's worked.



Sylvia (and Andrew) loves it. She plays with it all the time (and it only makes me slightly insane). Within a day or two, she could identify several letters. But more than that, she was excited about pointing out those letters.



She likes hearing which letters make which sounds.





Then last weekend, we were at Terry's and saw his Pinocchio doll. Sylvia said, "Puh, puh, puh, Pinocchio. What letter does puh make?" My jaw dropped. It's so exciting to see my kids start to engage in the world in new ways. For her to express - out of the blue - that she gets that words are made of sounds and that corresponds to a letter. Be still my heart:)



So thanks, LeapFrog for sparking my daughter's interest. I'm not a converted batteries-in-toys advocate, but it's neat to see how the right toy (or in other cases TV show or game) can launch a child in a new direction. Yay Sylvia!

**Carousel fun (2011-05-13 07:27)**

It was a cold and windy day when we met up with Jessica, Celia, and Eli and Seth, Nida, and Nola to hang out at the zoo. Bryan had been planning to kayak that morning, but the white caps on the lake sent him back home, so he joined us too. We all got to see the baby lion cub - Leo Pold. So cute!

While we were riding the carousel, I had fun taking photos of the Klabough, Taapken, and Dotzour kids.

Here's CC Jane, riding all by herself!





And there's Jessica with her adorable niece, Nola.



Despite the appearance, Sylvia was actually having a good time.



Here's Nola's big sister, Nida. She's such a sweetheart and will be in Sylvia's preschool class this fall.





Darling Nida.



Eli John. I miss this kid! With the boys in full-day kindergarten, I don't see E much. Hopefully that'll change this summer!



Andrew riding a jaguar.



Here's Seth (Jessica's brother) taking pics of Nida.



Here's me, riding a cassowary, taking a picture of myself (harder to time than one might think!).



There's Jessica, Nola, and Celia.



Andrew's looking less than totally enthused.





Buddies hug.





Cute Eli!



Thanks for a fun morning together, guys! Looking forward to seeing you together a lot more as the weather warms and school's out!

### **Sylvie and Celia (2011-05-14 07:30)**

Now that we don't have Toddler Time on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I thought it would be fun to plan more get-togethers with friends. So on Tuesday mornings for the remainder of the school year, I invited Celia and Rayna over. We've done it a couple times, and it's working so well. Those girls are too cute. They all love dress up, serving food, and playing babies. Ad nauseam. Which is why it's great when they have each other to play those games with!

Here's some sweet pictures that Jessica took of Sylvia and Celia on a Monday after tap class. I love it when Jessica takes pictures:) These just melt my heart.















Oh, and then there are these hugging pictures. I think these need to be blown up for a wall somewhere in our home! There's nothing like a good friend!





### **Andrew's first concert (2011-05-15 07:31)**

On May 2, Andrew had his first school concert. He was really looking forward to it, and even told me he wanted to wear his "fancy" clothes. I took a video if anyone wants to watch. Just Sylvia and I attended this year, but afterwards I heard from several people that they would like to attend future concerts. Andrew should have an early May concert again next year - I think I'll get the date at the beginning of the school year, and I'll share it then.

Here he is up on stage while they are setting up. The girl to his left is his locker partner, and the boy in front of him in the top picture is his bestest buddy.





Here's one of his two music teachers. They put together a great program, with a selection of music from all over the world. LOVE it!





Andrew's school - Nuestro Mundo - is a K-5 charter school and is housed in the Frank Allis school building along with Frank Allis Elementary. The two schools share the "special" teachers - gym, art, library, computers, and music. This concert was a combination of the three Nuestro Mundo kindergarten classes and the Frank Allis kindergarten classes. Here's the Frank Allis principal Julie Frentz introducing the kindergarten and first grader's concert - Julie seems like a dynamic and kind person:)



Here's all the adorable kindergarten kiddos.



Here's Andrew's teacher, Javier Bolivar, giving the introduction en Español.



Although we were sitting kinda far back, Andrew had a laser view of us and sang much of the concert right to me. So sweet!



Oh these kids! Too much:)



They sang several songs with sign language, and the first grade concert also incorporated a scarf dance and a traditional Afgan game into the concert. I love the diversity! So did Andrew.



Hard to believe that we're in the age of performances. Andrew hasn't taken part in sports teams or dance classes before, so this was the first time he's performed for us. He was so happy with himself. Go Andrew!

#### **Post-concert portraits (2011-05-16 07:33)**

After Andrew's music concert, I took some pictures of the kids in the soft evening light with my long lens. I'm filled with love when I look at these sweet faces!





Have I mentioned recently that I'd love to freeze both these little people right where they are?





Brother and sister - good friend!





She cracks me up.







Alivia was in the concert too (it was a first grade/kindergarten concert), so we all walked home together. The kids hid behind this tree. We were completely fooled as to their location.



Here's a couple sweet images of Alivia. Can't believe what a grown up girl she's becoming!





Have fun!

Althea

### **Be your own happiness (2011-05-17 07:24)**

I have several parenting books that have spoken to my heart these past years. Favorites include:

- Dr. Sears Baby Book
- Happiest Baby/Toddler on the Block
- Raising Your Spirited Child
- How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk
- Katrina Kenison's books
- and most recently, ScreamFree Parenting

The major thesis of the ScreamFree Institute is that you can't control your kids. It's about focusing on your own behaviors and reactions - being a model rather than attempting to mold/direct/force kids to behave certain ways. And it's helped me separate myself from my kids behavior (while remaining connected to them as individuals). For example, "I'll hold you while you thrash and scream, but I'm just going to be breathing deeply and thinking about other things rather than trying to fix what's making you mad or taking responsibility for making you stop."

I get a daily emailed parenting tip from ScreamFree (I really don't like that name, by the way...we're not a household where there's much screaming...other than by a small, curly-haired girl). This tip of the day really caught my eye (also copied below). If you're interested in the tip of the day, you can sign up here. It seems to apply to so much more than just parenting. I copied it onto Facebook, but I thought that it was good enough that I would share it here too. Enjoy!

April 28, 2011 | Here's your daily parenting tip from ScreamFree

"If your happiness depends on you children being happy, that makes them your hostages. Be your own happiness. And that way you are the teacher for your children: someone who knows how to live a happy life."

-Byron Katie, US author and speaker(1942- )

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Hal's Take:

Without even realizing it, we often base our own sense of happiness on external circumstances. We find ourselves dependant on things beyond our control to tell us how to feel. It is a very common thing to do. But just because it is common, does not make it helpful or mature. Feelings like happiness are choices that we must make on a daily basis - especially when it comes to our children.

If your child is throwing a tantrum or pitching a fit, guess what? That doesn't have to make you upset. You can still choose to be happy. If your child is moping about and grumbling about her life, guess what? You don't have to pull her out of her emotional ditch to feel good about yourself. You can still find

joy. Even if your child is yelling at you how horrible you are, you do not have to take it personally. You can find peace. This is a very freeing sentiment because it allows you to recognize a simple and powerful truth. No one can make you feel anything. When this truth can sink in, you will be in a much better position to really be with your child as they go through these difficult emotions. And they will see that you are stronger than the winds blowing around you. They will naturally gravitate towards you and your calm so that you will be able to provide comfort, consequences, or clarity when they need it most.

-Hal Runkel, LMFT, Author of *ScreamFree Parenting* and *ScreamFree Marriage*

### **Hiking the Ice Age trail (2011-05-18 07:51)**

A few weeks ago, Sylvia and I went on a hike in Cross Plains on the Ice Age Trail. For those of you not familiar with the Trail, it's a still-being-created foot trail in Wisconsin that covers over one thousand miles. It's one of nine National Scenic Trails and covers some spectacular parts of Wisconsin. The Ice Age Trail Alliance grows and maintains the trail and is a land trust. Gathering Waters Conservancy (my past employer) is an umbrella group for Wisconsin's land trusts, and on April 30th (while Andrew and Bryan attended a birthday party), Sylvia and I joined a hike and reception on a segment of the trail.

I hadn't taken Sylv hiking since last fall, and I was so impressed with how strong and robust of a hiker she's become.





She carried two sticks for most of the hike...banging them into trees and bushes as any good kid should.



During the hike, we stopped occasionally to hear about the conservation efforts.



Hiking along through the early spring woods. Sylv walked about two miles before she lost her steam. I was so proud of her:)



This girl innately understands posing. I set her on this outcropping, and she just looked so cute!



Here's looking across a bird-filled wetland.





Sylv zips down some switch-backs at the end of the hike.



Checking out the lichen on a rock with a magnifying glass.



Conor, Pam, and Mindy at the delicious reception (catered by Underground Catering). It's always great to see friends. Thanks, all, for organizing a really fun event!





### **Early Olbrich visit with Dad (2011-05-19 07:52)**

On May 5, the kids and I met up with my dad for an afternoon date at Olbrich gardens and an evening date of pot roast and Finding Nemo. Although it's been an incredibly cold spring, the flowers are beginning to bloom. And at Olbrich (or, if Joe's reading, the Botanic Gardens) the magnolias and cherry trees were a-bloomin'.

It feels so good to be seeing spring green after a long winter of browns and greys and whites.



The trees at Olbrich are oh-so pretty!



Here's the kiddos racing across the open field.



We tried to pose a picture of Dad with the kids, but it was not to be. Here's the closet we got:)



Oh my, this girl! Too much.





Cherry blossoms:)



Here's a pretty branch. Lightens up my heart.



Well, here's an almost- nice picture of Dad with Andrew and Sylvie...





These kids crack me up!



Sylvie started throwing a tantrum here that lasted until we left. But this was before the tantrum began.



Enjoying the reflecting pool.



Check out this Oriole! Spring!!!



I'm so proud of Andrew...he used my camera to take this picture (the strap was around my neck). I didn't re-  
2368

alize he was getting our reflection in this ball. What a cool image!



We always love spending time at Olbrich, so if you ever want to join us, just let me know!

### **Wildflower weekend at Jack's (2011-05-20 07:54)**

Every spring, our friend Jack hosts a "wildflower weekend." A group of friends gather and enjoy a long hike on Saturday in the woods and fields near Jack's home along the Wisconsin River. Although I figured that the kids and I wouldn't be joining in on a long hike, I thought it would be fun to be out at Jack's and to join in the festivities. Bryan was kayaking with friends on the Kickapoo River for the weekend, so on Friday night, the kids and I drove to Jack's (near Wyalusing State Park). On the way there, Andrew memorized the names of all the towns between Madison and Woodman.

The group composition changed over the course of the weekend, but there were an average of about 15 people. Here they are setting up lunches for everyone to pack.









This is one of my favorite new photos of Sylvia. She's wearing my swimsuit top. Goofy grape:)



Here's Robin and Trent hanging out pre-hike.



Andrew's kiss. Much sweeter than a dementor.



Adorable girl!



Hikers getting ready to depart.



I had wanted to start the hike with everyone and to only go a couple miles. Andrew wanted to "stay inside all day." I think this face he's making is his victory face. We were not leaving to go on the hike. HaHA!



I told the kids that I would shrivel up if we stayed inside on such a beautiful day. So they (clad only in Andrew's briefs) agreed to run around out-of-doors for a while.





Undies on the hill overlooking the Wisconsin River.





Jack was able to burn the prairie earlier in the week. It's so cool to see it all freshly charred.



Here's an oriole in the tree in front of Jack's house. What a beautiful sight!



Here's a sweet plaque in honor of Jack's mom. Such a lovely sentiment.



Jack has done an amazing amount of restoration work on his land. Here's a new sign he has on his driveway.



Andrew kindly put together pine cones and pine boughs and dandelions as place decorations for the returning hikers. He was so excited about how happy they would be to see their pretty place settings!



After the hikers returned, some of us went on a walk up onto Jack's property to check on his bluebird houses.





Andrew stayed home and covertly ate candy bars while Sylvie and I explored the freshly burned prairie and oak savannah.



Pretty! A bird's foot violet!



One house had two precious eggs.



We enjoyed supper up on the hill and then waited for sunset. The kids and I exited since these days sunset is bedtime!





What a friendly, joyful group.



I love this picture of Sylvie walking up the hill. Somehow the scale of her next to the tree and the hill just makes me love her that much more.



Here's looking out the bedroom window at the sunset-watchers. It took the kids almost an hour to go to sleep!



Sunset over the river.



Day is done.



### **Kids, mud, and the Wisconsin River (2011-05-21 07:56)**

While we were at Jack's the kid's favorite part was hanging out down by the banks of the Wisconsin River. The river is really high and in this segment has gone over its banks a bit, creating a nice shallow area. An area that the kids would come to find was a great swimming/mud hole.



Love these two little nature explorers!





Tiny spring leaves glowing in the light.



As they waded it, I warned them that they'd get their boots full of water if they went out too far. Moments later, their boots filled with water.



Looking across the river.



Andrew took about 50 pictures of Sylvie just standing there. I told him that he really didn't have to keep pressing the shutter because she wasn't really changing what she was doing. "I can't help it!" he said. "She's just SO CUTE!" I know the feeling, Buddy.



Sylv gets her hands muddy. I encourage her to wipe them off on the grass instead of on me.



The the kids pulled off their waterlogged boots, attempted to roll up their pants, and marched around in the mud.



Back at Jack's they hosed down their feet in the sauna.





Later in the day, we headed back to the water. This time, Andrew and Sylvie didn't mess around. They both stripped down and started splashing in the water. I love these three images:)







Running in the water!



Oh be still my heart. My two naked kiddos on the river.



Around this time, Andrew got cold. He rinsed off in the water and put his clothes back on. Sylvie, on the other hand, started going for the full-body mud experience.



This photo below is Terry's favorite. The look she's giving me amidst all the mud really is kinda spectacular.



Nothing like mud!



This is one happy, mud-covered girl.



While Sylvie indulged her muddiness, Andrew gathered flowers for me.



Thanks, my boy, for the Mother's Day bouquet!





### **Back from Wichita (2011-05-23 22:27)**

It's late on Monday night as I write this, and I need to head to bed so I can get up with some pep for my bootcamp class in the morning. However, I had to share one of my favorite images from our weekend in Wichita. We flew down on Friday morning and had a sweet and heart-filled time visiting Bryan's grandparents Grandma Jo and Grandpa Harvey, with Granny, Grandad, and Melanie (who all joined us from Texas), and an evening visit with the Andersons & Buchanans.

Our flights home on Sunday night were scuttled, so we ended up driving home instead. The kids did great:)

I'm going to try to finish editing and uploading images tonight, but here's a sneak peak of Sylvie dancing on air.



## 7.6 June

### Paint disaster (2011-06-17 15:34)

How is it that it's been almost a month since I last posted? My focus turned to other things. I haven't even written about our trip to visit grandparents in Wichita. Maybe soon...

However, I've been jolted out of my non-blogging status by an incident this afternoon. I had some work to do in the basement, so I asked the kids to amuse themselves for a while. "No eating," I said, remembering the bag-o-marshmallows eating incident from last week. "Or leaving the yard. Or doing things that your conscious tells you are maybe not a good idea." I asked them to get along and be good because after I was done working I'd be tired and my "bucket" might be a little low.

I didn't specify that they shouldn't take out the paints. That'll be on the list next time.

So after doing some heavy, dirty not-really-fun work in the basement for a half hour, I come upstairs to see this:



And I almost sat down on the floor and wept.

I know why they did it, you see, I'd just rearranged all the art supplies. The painting supplies had been previously stashed in several different places, but now they are all together in organized glory in the old general art supply drawer. There's paint they've never seen before. There's new fingerpainting paper. There are brushes galore.



I did some heavy breathing. With my eyebrows lifted high, I firmly extolled upon Andrew and Sylvia the importance of getting permission from an adult before initiating a painting project. I questioned the wisdom of dumping out the entire contents of large bottles of paint.

The two of them kept catching each others' eyes and smiling; then repressing the smile and trying to look apologetic. It wasn't working. The giggles that wafted from the bathroom as they washed the brushes ticked me off.



Don't get me wrong, I'm all in favor of big, messy painting experiences. I just like to do them outdoors.

In this case, there was all sorts of paint tucked into the seams in our hardwood floors. Colorful:) Very hard to remove.



I did consider crying, but it's really not my style. So although I wasn't really in the mood, I took out my camera to capture the disaster pre-cleanup. I sent the kids to their rooms for 15 minutes while I did the bulk of the cleanup. There was so much paint on the floor that it seemed that having them wipe it up would have brought things from a localized disaster to a full-room/house paint bomb. Their main consequence is that there's no painting until July.





Oh those kids, those kids. You should have seen the mischievous twinkle in their eyes. I love them so much, and I'm so proud of them. Being their mom can sometimes lead me to long for Happy Hour.

Fondly,

Althea

### **Three girls a-picnic-ing (2011-06-18 05:00)**

Sylvia's Toddler Time class at Monona Grove Nursery School ended in late April. In order to keep up her socialization and to retain some structure to our week, I invited her friends Celia and Rayna to come play at our house on Tuesdays in May and early June.

The three girls had a topsy-turvy time...sometimes being a complete delight (see pictures below) and sometimes (in Sylvia's case, many times) experiencing high degrees of angst over the difficulties of three-year-old interactions. I thought of it as having the opportunity to flex that "working-with-other-people" muscle. No matter what, though, Sylva and I always looked forward to the days that our friends would come over to play.

Here's some photos of our crew of three enjoying each other's company on a warm May day.

First, picnicking and striking a pose:









I love these three of Rayna.









Here's some cuties of Miss Celia Carina Jane







And my very own tutu girl.





Three friends.

These pictures here kinda make my chest hurt to look at. Oh those three!









The maple tree out front had just flowered, and I lay on my back looking up through the new green flowers, soaking up spring.



Thanks, Kathy and Jessica, for sharing your amazing girls with me. So glad that Sylvie has them as friends and I have you two as friends!!



## Mud Run (2011-06-19 05:12)

Back on May 15, I ran the Madison Mud Run with some bootcamp buddies - Julie, Heather, and Deb as well as some of their friends. When Bryan, Melanie, and I ran it last October (see post here) and nearly froze ourselves to pieces, I expected that the spring run would be a warm-weather walk in the park. Well, the temperatures were well above freezing, but it as still a chilly-cold and very windy day.

The theme for the run was "super heros," and our team name was The Masked Capers.

Here we are clean BEFORE.



And filthy AFTER.



The fall event is scheduled for October 29. Anyone want to run with me?

### **Bryan's birthday (2011-06-20 05:14)**

On Bryan's birthday (May 17), I ran to Java Cat to get some tasty breakfast treats. The kids put all our candles in the two chocolate eclairs. Here's the birthday boy with his kiddos.





Digging in to a delicious breakfast. Sylvie wanted to sit right next to Bryan, so she pushed her chair up so it was touching his:)



Andrew made a special birthday card for Bryan. Such a sweet kiddo.



Looks to me like Bryan likes his gift. Those two boys are such a joy in my heart.



Happy 33rd birthday, hon! I've enjoyed being the same age as you this last month, but I'm going to go ahead and try out 34 now. xoxo

### **May trip to Wichita - Part I: Comings and goings (2011-06-21 05:41)**

On May 20, we took our bags and our expert-kid-flyers and headed down to Wichita, Kansas to see Bryan's grandparents for our annual spring visit. Melanie and Bryan's dad were driving up from Texas to meet us at the airport. Bryan's mom had been in Wichita for the last week, providing support to Grandma Jo and Grandpa Harvey - both of whom were having a rough week.



Grandma Jo (that's Mark's mom) has been living in her home on the golf course, working at Economy Corner, visiting the gym, and generally living a pretty active life. She's been having some health problems recently, and she's been in and out of the hospital these last months. She'd gone in to the hospital the week of our visit, and she had decided to move into an assisted living facility when she was discharged. So LuAnn spent the week before our visit getting her new place set up. Fast action! And while I'm sure it will take a while to feel like home, all the homey touches LuAnn prepared really do make it feel like a loving place to be.

Our visits with Grandma Jo were at the hospital, which was a little sad for everyone, but it was nice to see Grandma Jo in high spirits and in good color:)

Grandpa Harvey (that's LuAnn's dad) has been having kind of a hard time since his wife of 70 years died last May. He's been in an assisted living community, and while he's a real sweetie to everyone, he's increasingly losing touch with the "whens" and the "whos" of life. He really can't seem to hold it in his head that his Lola Mae is gone.

The day of our arrival, Grandpa Harvey had some sort of further incident. Perhaps a stroke (although they said it wasn't) or just a jump in the confusion of the mind. So he was moved from his assisted living home to a hospital as well.

And thus, Mark, LuAnn, Melanie, Bryan, Andrew, Sylvia, and I traveled from hospital to hospital to visit our dear sweet grandparents.

Before we get to that, though, I thought you'd like to see some pictures of Melanie and the kids goofing off.

Here's Andrew being crazy silly with his super-ooper-duper favorite Aunt Mel.



There's Sylvie playing with some dollies she found at Grandpa Harvey's hospital waiting room.





These next ones are silly. This is Sylvia posing while Granny and Melanie take photos of her...



Adorable! Granny, looks like you were getting a good shot there!



Total ham!



Here's Melanie reading the kids their bedtime story. It all looks so peaceful.



Now it's funny! Ahh, the giggles:)



Much laughter was had. Mel, you're a great story-teller.



Here's Sylvie trying on some new purple flipflops from Aunt Mel. So sparkly!





And here's a little tour of Grandma Jo's apartment.



The bedroom complete with lots of pictures.



Andrew and Sylvia had fun trying out the organ.



Here's a great wall of images. From the top-left counter-clockwise: Gordon and Betty Jo on their wedding day, Gordon, Grandma Doll (Grandma Jo's mom), Betty Jo, Bryan, Melanie, Grandma Jo working on a plane during WWII (see the close-up below), family photo when Andrew was a babe, Uncle Thane (Grandma Jo's brother), and...hmmm...not sure about that last one. Maybe Grover Gordon and Jennie Dotzour.



And here's a picture of Grandma Jo as a Rosie the Riveter at the Boeing plant in Wichita.



This is a nice picture of Dandy and Grandma Jo that's now hanging above the organ in the living room.



When I took these pictures, Grandma Jo hadn't yet seen her new place. And we were off to visit her at the hospital...

### **May trip to Wichita - Part II: Visiting Grandma Jo (2011-06-22 05:22)**

When we were visiting Grandma Jo at the hospital, we took over the waiting room for our time together. The kids, sensing the opportunity to perform for a rapt audience, took full advantage of the attention:)





Grandma had her hair colored specially for our visit. The hue? A sunny marigold:)





There's always a lot of laughing when Grandma Jo's around.



These two monkeys, too, caused quite a bit of silliness...





I thought this was so cute. Grandma Jo was smelling Sylvie's feet to see how they smelled.



One of my favorite images from the trip...



We came back for a visit the next day and settled in to the now-familiar waiting room.



Andrew loves the game Blink, and here he and Granddad duke it out.





Andrew and Grandma Jo play some sort of arm-raising game. Perhaps they are practicing their semaphore.



So there's our pictorial review of our visit. Grandma Jo ended our visits with an elbow bump rather than her traditional leg kick. We'll see if it sticks:)



It was sad not to be seeing Grandma Jo either in her home or in her new apartment, but we certainly did have a nice time together, no matter where the location. Grandma Jo is such a lively, vivacious woman. It's sad to know that her health is really causing her some problems these days. I hope that she'll have a health-filled summer.

### **May trip to Wichita - Part III: Visiting Grandpa Harvey (2011-06-23 05:30)**

Grandpa Harvey has had a really rough year. Perhaps one of the saving graces is that it doesn't seem like he remembers much of it. Lola Mae passed away in May of 2010, and since then, Grandpa has been living in an assisted living community. The day we arrived in Wichita for our visit, he took a turn for the worse, and spent a few days at the hospital. He's now living in a higher-assistance memory care facility.

During our visit, Grandpa's presence faded in and out. I'm sure we were a really overwhelming crew, but he seemed happy to see us.

Here he's saying hi to Sylvie. She had her little bunny give him kisses, which they both enjoyed.



There's Bryan greeting his granddaddy. Grandpa Harvey really is one of the nicest, kindest-hearted people I've ever met.



The kids discovered a bowling set in the corner of the room, so they enjoyed a rousing game of bowling-at-the-hospital.







Checking out a mysterious red button on a teddy bear.



Andrew and Sylv check out Grandpa and the bear.





Grandpa recognized Melanie, so that's nice to know that they connected.





At one point, Grandpa got the bowling ball and threw a couple frames.



Sylvie and Grandpa play with a teddy bear.



There's our dear Grandpa. Love him so much... Leaving him there alone at the hospital was gut-wrenching. Grandpa's had a life-well-lived. I hope these upcoming months are peaceful and content, in whatever times or places his mind might take him. Love you, Grandpa!



#### **May trip to Wichita - Part IV: Visiting with Julie, Jerry & crew (2011-06-24 05:36)**

On Saturday evening of our visit in Wichita, we visited with our good friends, Julie and Jerry Anderson. Julie and Bryan were good friends and neighbors as kids. Her husband Jerry is a great guy, and they have two little ones - Grayson (6) and Carter (2). On this visit, Julie's parents, Janie and Van Buchanan, joined us too. It was a lot of fun to see friends!

Here's the whole gang with a little balance-the-camera-on-the-truck trick.





When we visited last year (see post [here](#)), Julie and Jerry were just about to put their house up for sale. So it was great to see their new beautiful home!



Before supper, the boys all hung out in the living room.





The boys getting ice cream. Grayson's a big Jay Hawk fan. Takes after his parents, uncles, and grandparents I think.



This little Carter dude was so adorable. I couldn't stop taking pictures!



After dinner, we headed out to the driveway where the kids all played with bikes and balls and chalk and the hours sped by.

Love this new picture of Sylvia skipping along in the sunshine.



One kid pushing, one kid riding.



Wait, what?! Two kids riding.



Grayson's quite a biking force. This kid's got good physical acumen.



There's Carter with his Grandma. So nice that they get to spend so much time together:)





Andrew and Carter played some t-ball. I think we can consider the evening a rousing success since neither of them walloped the other in the head with a ball or bat. There were a few close-calls!



Sir Carter-of-the-adorable-eyes.



The boys played with the soccer ball for a while. Grayson's a skilled boy, and he shows a lot of focus and drive to play.



Another one of Janie and Carter. Too cute!



There's Julie with Carter and Jerry in the background.



Look at that beautiful boy:)





After dinner, Sylvia made a bee-line for the costumes <aside: warning - if we come to your home, Sylvie will find your costumes. even if you thought they were just your clothes.>

Sylv and Grayson took a break from coloring for a sweet pic.



Noting that the four kids were in the same location for the first (and only) time during the evening, I ran over to get an Anderson/Dotzour kids photo.





So glad that it worked that we were able to all be together. Whenever Bryan and I get to spend time with Julie and Jerry, we always find ourselves wishing we had more opportunities to play and hang out together. Oh well, we'll take what we can get! Thanks again, guys:)

**Soccer! (2011-06-25 05:44)**

Andrew and Sylvia are two years apart in age between February and June. And it just so happened, that Monona had a soccer skills class for 3-5 year olds this spring. Then it shockingly aligned so that both kids wanted to participate. Crazy.

Eli and Celia joined us, and we enjoyed five nice evenings (Thursdays in May and early June) watching the kid-dos play about.



Eli's sixth birthday was on a soccer day. Here's his newly-hatched Sixness:



And there's CC. Water breaks were a major component of the soccer skills class.



Hi me:)





Soccer buddies





Here are the kids running around on another evening...







It's chaos out there! Then, I caught Andrew on camera doing cartwheels:)



There aren't any soccer classes that work with our schedule this summer, and the kids aren't interested in tennis or t-ball etc. Andrew said he might be interested in karate, so perhaps we'll add that in at some point. In the meantime, this was a great, low-key initiation to the world of kids sports:)

**Sweet Sylvia (2011-06-26 05:49)**

On a balmy evening in late May, I captured some pictures of my beautiful girl as she ran and rolled and frolicked in a grassy field.



I think this is my favorite picture of Sylv. I love the level look she's giving me!



Look at all that life and energy just oozing out of her:) It seems to shine from the tips of her hair.



Thinking...





And then running. Again and again...



Oh Sylv, I'm so glad to be your mama. You do drive me to the brink of insanity from time to time, but it's all in good fun, right?





You're a little like this oak leaf...just unfolding, still soft and tender and green. You've got a lot of growing to do, my girl. But there isn't much sweeter than a young life, alive with promise and brimming with vigor. I can't wait to watch you grow and to experiences so much more of life together.



**Bryan kayaking on the Wisconsin River (2011-06-27 05:51)**

Bryan's been having fun getting out on the water in his new fabulous kayak. On Memorial Day weekend, he brought his boat up to Tom's place and spent a couple hours paddling down the Wisconsin from Spring Green to Lone Rock.

Here's my kayaking guy pre-trip.



The kayak traveled on top of the car. Bryan took all the straps off.



Then he flipped it off the "J" rack



and carried it down to the water.



Easy as pie, right, hon? Do you like it when I stand here photographing you incessantly? Huh, huh, huh?





Such a beautiful day for a paddle.



He sets the kayak down on the beach,



gets his PFD and paddle,



Settling in...



And he's off!



Toodles, Babe:)





He met us back at Tom's really quickly. Love that paddling man:)









We visited Tower Hill State Park. The weather was on the sweltering side (in the 90s), but the kids did well.



Andrew has magical powers to help bring Sylvie out of her downer-moods. Here he's cajoling and sweet-talking.



She doesn't seem to be responding...





Ahh, but there she is! The door opens, and she leaves the gloomy humdrums behind. Thanks, Andrew!



What is this in this cave? Why, it can't be..



YES! It is two ferocious BEARS! Just look at their claws!



Up at the top of the hill, looking out over the Wisconsin River valley, with Spring green to the left.



Andrew was a little tired and got a lift down the hill from Tom. Lucky lad:)





### Andrew's Kindergarten graduation (2011-06-29 14:01)

On a nice evening in early June, Andrew graduated from Kindergarten.



I've got to say that at first blush, I wasn't a big fan of the idea of Kindergarten graduation. Wouldn't it be more appropriate, I thought, to have an ice cream party and say "Yay! You've made it through your first year!" But a full-out graduation ceremony?? Even middle school graduation strikes me as a little silly. I love to celebrate milestones, but doesn't it somehow make other graduations (like college or graduate school) kinda blase. These kids are expected and required to pass from KG to first grade. So we can celebrate that they've met their requirements? I sort of shrugged and smiled and went along.

The morning of the graduaiton, Andrew was really excited, and I thought that was sweet.

Then as we sat in our metal folding chairs in the gym, Andrew's class started to file in...

...and my heart melted.



Look at how excited they all are!



Oh, did you ever see such a sweet and earnest guy?



Look at me! I'm now a fan of Kindergarten graduations! My heart has been won over by the adorable nature of the students. I look at them all up there on stage, and I imagine the years going by like the scenery flashing past the windows on a train. If we stay at this school, Andrew could know many of these kids for the next 12 years. As I watched them smile and wave to parents and goof off together, I could still see them all for the little people they still are. They're just past being preschoolers! But I can also see shadows of the teens that they will grow to become. Oh, the emotion! I shake my head at the wonder of it all.



Bryan, Sylvia, and Tom joined us for the afternoon ceremony.



As the principal called each child's name, they came up, shook Maestra Laura's hand,



walked across the stage (some kids nearly leaped across the stage, so great was their excitement!),



and shook hands with the acting principal.





Then each student received his or her certificate of graduation,



and held it up for a quick photo moment.



Andrew held his up for an extra moment just to make sure I captured it. I do so love that little guy!



Nuestro Mundo Community School has three Kindergarten classes, and after they'd all received their certificates and sang their songs, we adjourned to eat cookies and drink juice. A potent sugar combination at 2:30pm.



Here's Andrew and Sylvia with Maestra Laura. Boy did we get lucky this year to have such a great teacher for our guy.



Party, party, party!



Sylvia (a.k.a. Angelina Ballerina) is pointing out an "s". That's "s" for Sylvia. The wonderful thing? She finds them everywhere!



So there you have our Kindergarten graduation experience. My little guy is now on his way to being a first grader. There's no stopping him now. Reminds me of a post I wrote on July 8, 2005:

"Bryan and I have been having a wonderful time getting to know our precious little baby. A couple days ago, we took him for his first visit to Olbrich Botanical Gardens (see photos in the gallery). I think he liked hearing the birds and feeling the sunshine. His umbilical cord fell off too, so he's pretty much an old man now."

Go get 'em, Andrew!



## Andrew's first "tri" - the Sawyer Crossen Triathlon (2011-06-30 21:07)

On June 4, Andrew and Eli participated in Monona's Sawyer Crossen Memorial Triathlon. Andrew had been excited about signing up, but the day before the event, he declared that he was not interested in participating. After some cajoling and light bribery, I'd about given up on him participating. But I asked him to pick up his goodie bag at the registration table. When we got to the registration, Andrew was a little mesmerized by the maps showing the routes for the different age groups. He traced the biking and running routes with his finger, intrigued.

And then when he gave him name to the registration lady, she gave him the run down on where to pin his bib and where to leave his bike, and when he turned around from that conversation, I could tell from the sparkle in his eyes that he was hooked.

The next morning, we met up with an excited Eli for the event. Here's the boys getting pumped before the start.





Probably not a necessity for the 4-6 year olds, but they had ankle bands to record their times. And their bib numbers were written on their legs and arms just like real triathletes:)



Here's a view of the Monona Pool, where they started with the swim. They had kickboards or swim noodles and paddled 40 meters from the shallow end to the orange pyramid and then down a lap.



They staggered the kids' start and had lifeguards posted every few feet, and it looked like it went really well. They're so cute!



There you can see the start on the far left and then they get out on the far right.



After the kids get out, they supposed to hop on their bikes and go up and down a few blocks (about a half mile). I ran around from the swimming viewing area to the bike transition area, and both our boys were standing there looking around, sort of watching the clouds pass by. So I helped them slip on their t-shirts and get their shoes on so they could bike.

I do so love five/six year olds. They're so grown up, and yet, they're really still such little people.



Here's Andrew heading down the street. Training wheels and all.



Eli speeds on by.



Andrew ditched his bike and took off running.





Wisely, they had volunteers closely interspersed along the quarter mile run to keep the young ones going the right direction.



There's my boy, running to greet me. He is 100 % convinced that he won the triathlon. He was so proud of himself and jazzed about the whole experience. LOVE that boy.



What joy!



Our athletes post-race.



After the race, we hung out at the park and enjoyed snow cones and some of the treats from the registration bags. Andrew got to see Bucky Badger and the Madison Mallard and a couple other large creatures. Sylvia did a great job helping to cheer on the boys. And she loved playing on the playground. She's been petrified of heights recently, but in this instance, she was a comfortable climber.





Wonder what she's thinking there...





Oh, what light!



This picture now hangs on my living room wall in a 20x30" float wrap. Makes me so happy!



After we got home from the triathlon, Andrew requested that I find him additional tri's to participate in. There's one in Middleton on August 20. Maybe we'll sign up!

## 7.7 July

### Sylvia the tapper (2011-07-02 06:13)

I got my first fancy SLR digital camera when Sylvia was about six months old. I so wanted to capture the fleeting moments of her infant-hood, and needed more creative control of the imagery I was creating.

I wanted to get professional pictures taken of my kids, but truth be told, I just wanted to take those pictures myself.

Sitting here at Sylvia's last tap class on June 6, I was so glad that I have my camera as an extension of my hand. It really doesn't get much better than photographing a group of adorable 3-5 year olds dancing at the YMCA.



Can you tell that she's having a good time?



Learning to grapevine. That's a skill everyone should have.



And the shuffle step! Very important for tap.



That curl coming down in front of her eye just slays me.



- oh, the shoes -





My beautiful girl's curly locks. Maybe my favorite picture.



Oh that marching tutu. You know, she's wearing my tutu. I got it for the Mud Run last fall. She has me pin it for her so it fits her waist:)



She's so excited to be dancing for me. Love love love that girl.



The concentration showing in the way she's holding her hands; the various activities of the other girls; the beauty of all those cute bodies. Ahh, it's just too much.



I love the way she's watching amidst the activity.





Dance with abandon, my daughter!



Make that crazy skirt dance!





I love these next two:)



Here she is with her fantastic teacher, Ari. Thanks for a great session, Ari. Next stop - ballet. We'll hit tap again soon:)



I'll close with a little video I took with my phone of the girls doing their thing.

[flickr video=5805174507]

### **Walking alone on the last day of KG (2011-07-03 06:16)**

Wow, these posts are behind! Seems like the days of Andrew being in school were ages ago. We're in full-on summer mode around here these days!

On June 9, the day before the last day of school, Andrew requested that he walk himself to school. Our main point of concern is crossing Davies street, but I've been helping him learn how to do that safely for years. And he was pretty set on the idea. So we gave him the green light. Here he is, ready for his first solo walk...



Off he goes. Farewell, my son!



What a growing up boy! When I picked him up after school, his face fell - he thought he was walking home too and was a little devastated to see me. So I let him go home ahead while I picked up his friend Alivia and walked her home. I wonder if this solo walking thing will come up again in the fall...

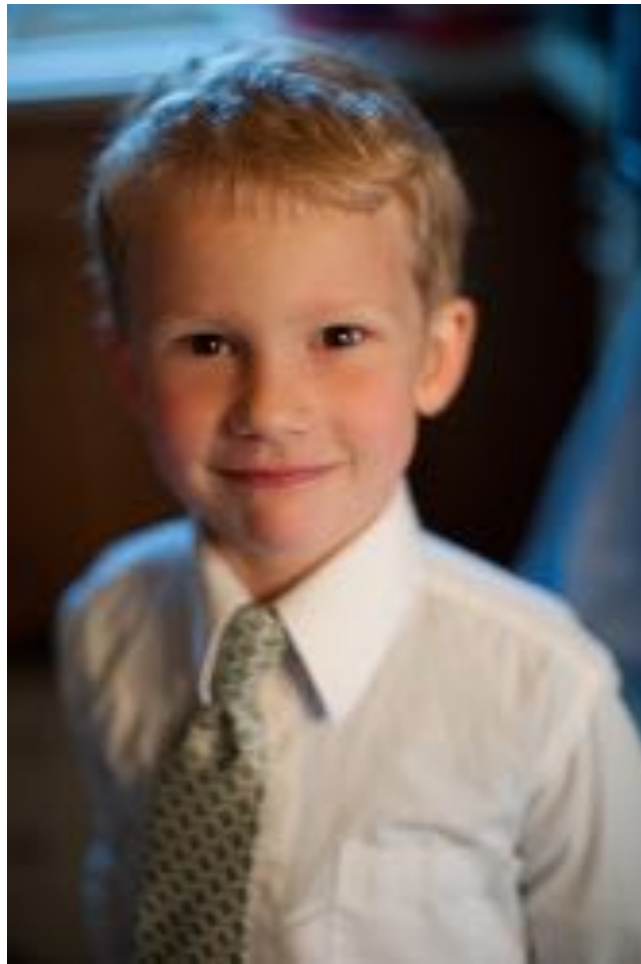


Here's the last day of school. Andrew decided on his own that he wanted to dress spiffy for the last day of school, and he came out of his room with his white dress shirt and his tie.



Oh, this boy. He's so smart, and his beautiful spirit just sparkles from his eyes. I'm so glad that his first year of school was such a positive experience! Love you, Andrew!





### **Goats are cute too (2011-07-04 06:53)**

I really love to photograph people. I enjoy capturing photograph evidence of the connections between families. But on a nice June afternoon at Peck's Market in Lone Rock, I had fun photographing silly goats too!

Bryan was in Vancouver, BC for the weekend, so the kids and I headed out to Tom's house on the Wisconsin River in Lone Rock to play. On Sunday afternoon, we visited Peck's Farm Market and spent a few hours playing in the sand, on the equipment, and petting the goats, sheep, horses, and lamas.

Sylvia loves animals.



This trio of floppy eared goats just stole my heart!



How cute is this!?



The shiny eyes, the soft nose, the sleek hair...beautiful!





Uh oh, another cutie. This time it's a sheep.







Here's a pretty peacock. When he raised his tail, Sylvia ran toward me pell-mell, yelling, "MOM! Come quick! There's something magical!!!"



This mama goat has two adorable baby kids in her pen. So sweet!



The kids played with these sand toys for hours.



Roar!!



Here's Sylv overcoming her fear of heights again...



And a new favorite image of my boy. What a handsome man! To get that smile, I asked him a multiplication questions. Love that sparkle, Andrew!





### **Swimming lessons (2011-07-05 06:28)**

We've been doing swimming lessons at the Monona pool since the first day of summer vacation. Hours spend pool-side are some of my favorite of the year!

Here's a little show of Andrew jumping off the diving board. So amazing!





Sylvia's in the big pool now - Squirts A! Last year she was too young for swimming lessons, and this year she's delighted with her swimming lessons status.



Here's a couple adorable pics that Jessica took post-lessons one day...



A good friend is such a treasure in life!



Here's CC and Sylvie in the little pool as Paddling Penguins.



Check out Celia putting her head under water!



Heading out in a noodle train.



Here's another series of Andrew jumping...









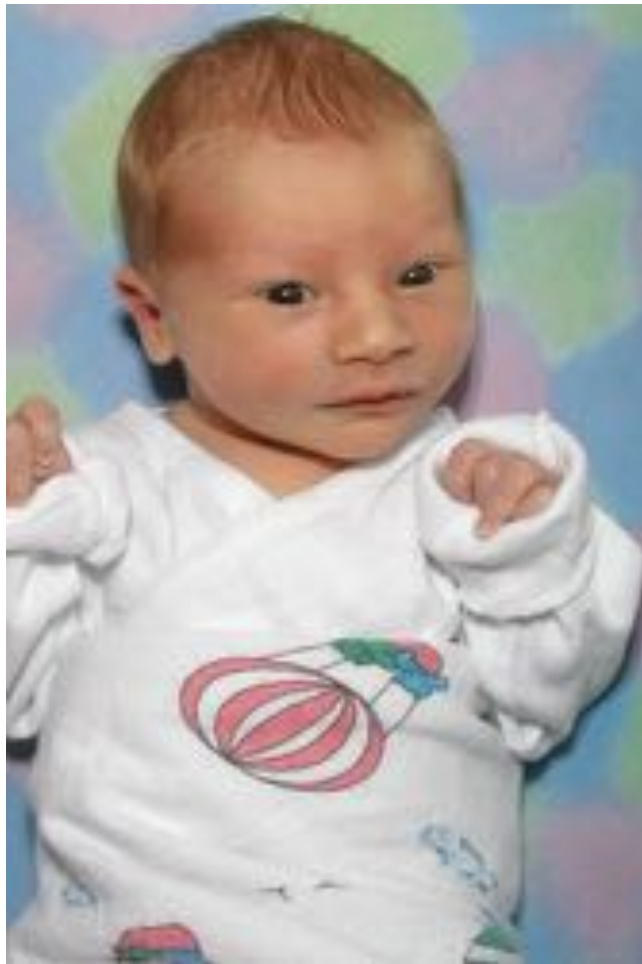


We're doing swimming lessons through this week, and then we are doing a session in August. I'm already looking forward to it!

### **Andrew's birthday (2011-07-06 06:55)**

Andrew's 6th birthday was on June 22nd. I can't believe that my little guy is six!!

Remember when he was zero?



Or just one year old...



A new Two



There he's Three.



Four...





Five!



And now Six.



For Bryan's birthday in May, I had picked up some eclairs and croissants from Java Cat for breakfast. Andrew requested the breakfast "chocolate cake" for his birthday. And when he woke up he was delighted to see me come home from the gym with his birthday breakfast treats. Cake for breakfast...a fun way to start the day!





After swimming lessons, we headed over to Jessica, Eli, and Celia's house for lunch. Andrew requested a candle, and Jessica happened to have a "6" candle for him. So she cut open a peach and we all sang.



Sweet hugs between Andrew and Eli...





Jessica looks on



So glad that my kids have Jessica in their lives.



I think she loves him:)



He had a happy birthday indeed! After playing with our friends for the afternoon, we went to Andrew's favorite restaurant - Flavor of India - for "Indian 'Uhfet" His favorite food? Chicken tikka masala along side a mango lassi. Yummy, yum, yum. Welcome to Sixdom, Andrew! I think it'll be a great year for you.

## Obsessed (2011-07-21 07:09)

Greetings all!

I'm writing to you from my couch in the early hours of the morning. Sylvia woke up at 4:30, and by the time I got her back to sleep, I was feeling pretty awake myself. I considered going to the Y or for a run, but instead, I crawled back to my familiar nest on the couch with my friend the laptop.

A couple nights ago, Bryan and I sat down to watch a couple episodes of Parenthood, and I figured I'd do something on the computer while I watched. 36 hours later, I'd completed a massive photo-uploaded campaign. I didn't go to bed until almost 3am, and then I worked on it constantly most the next day. Why do I do these things?

I started this blog in May 2005, and since that time, I've shared about 10,000 pictures (that averages out to about 5 images a day). But I'd got to thinking that I have all these pictures on my computer from 2000-2005 that aren't available for sharing. What good are they doing me on my computer when they could be available to family and friends and the wide world? What if I'm away from my computer and wanted to know what year I visited Yellowstone? Now I can find out (it's August of 2002).

Before uploading the photos, I had to pick my favorites (fortunately, they're all organized on my computer into folders by activity and season). Then I uploaded the photos into Flickr using my new version of Lightroom. Each album (known in Flickr lingo as a set) gets put in a collection, which I list by season. Ridiculously, the sets had to be dragged one by one into the correct order. It took hours. However, I'm happy to say that all 608 sets are now in happy chronological order. My heart is at peace.

Here's a snapshot of some of the collections:



Winter 2003

8 sets / Edit Museum



Summer 2003

8 sets / Edit Museum



Fall 2003

8 sets / Edit Museum



Spring 2003

8 sets / Edit Museum



Summer 2002

8 sets / Edit Museum



Summer 2001

8 sets / Edit Museum



Spring 2002

8 sets / Edit Museum



Winter 2002

8 sets / Edit Museum



Spring 2001

8 sets / Edit Museum



Winter 2001

8 sets / Edit Museum



Fall 2000

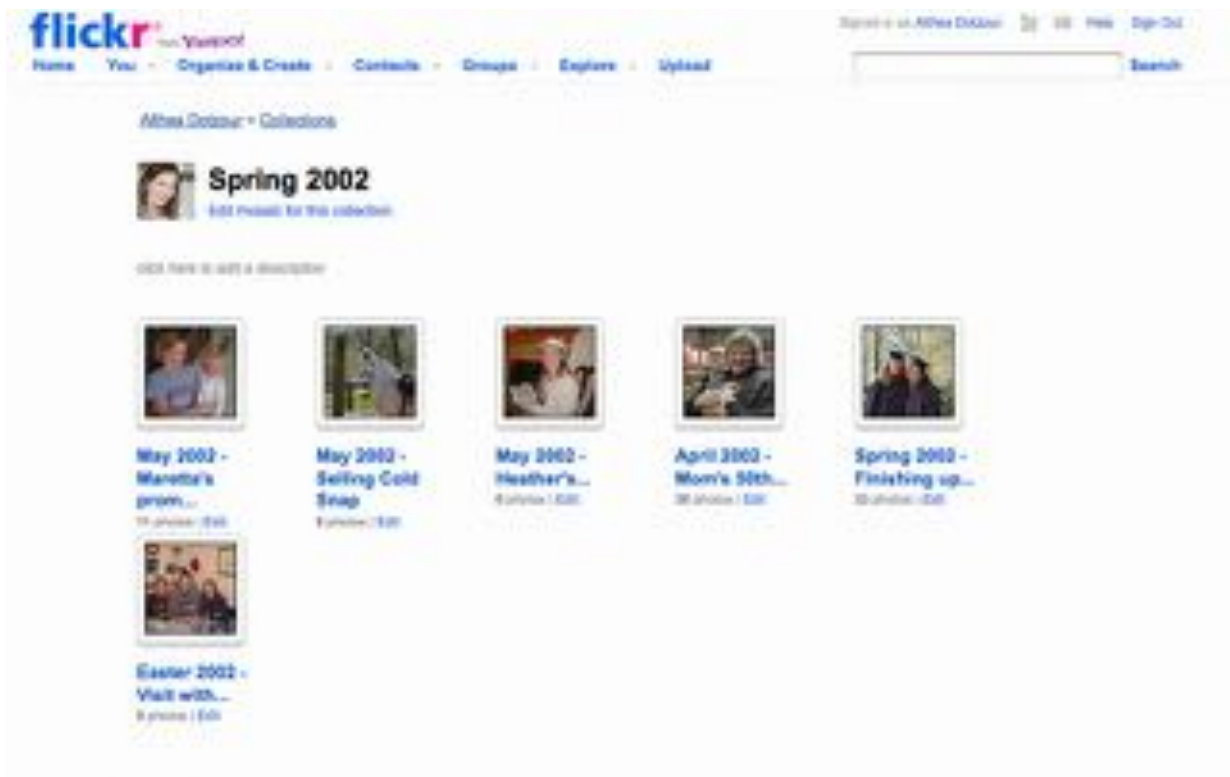
8 sets / Edit Museum



Summer 2000

8 sets / Edit Museum

In the last day or so, I've uploaded about 4,000 images from my early digital camera years. It was a little like being in a mind warp to spend a solid day immersed in the images of a time long gone. I'd forgotten how many photos I'd taken of my plants and my house and my cats and of April. Pre-kids, I had to unleash my photographing needs on something!



I loved looking back and remembering some of the best times of my married life pre-kids. Good visits with friends, camping and weddings and holidays with family. I liked seeing all the many pictures I've taken of our apartments and homes, and I can clearly remember the potent mix of feelings I had when we left our friends in Ann Arbor to come move to Madison. It's sad to see pictures of us with people who are now gone...especially my mom...but it's also lovely to revisit some of the times we were all together. For me, photographs take me back to the moment the shutter clicked. I can feel the breeze and smell the air. I can remember how a moment later, I reached over to touch the person. So spending a full day processing all these images makes me feel a little like I fell down a rabbit hole. "When are we?" I want to ask. Then my kids clamber about, and I remember:)

You can see all my photos organized by:

- Collection (season)
- Set (album)
- Tag (although I've only tagged about 1/4 of the pictures)
- Calendar (see the image below). I think my camera's date information wasn't working for much of the early 2000s, so most (but not all) pictures before then don't show on the correct date. However, it's really cool to flip through the months and to see a pictorial journal over time.





OK, I've had 14 blog entries (all drafted and waiting for some attention) and a few photo sessions to finish, so enough with this obsessive photo archiving business. Enjoy taking a trip down memory lane:)

Althea

### **Playing with Granny and Grandad (2011-07-24 21:00)**

Back in late June, oh, actually a month ago today, Bryan's parents flew up to Madison to help us celebrate Andrew's 6th birthday.

As usual, at my request (Please, please, please!), Granny made Andrew's birthday cake.

Here, Sylvia helps Granny lightly apply sprinkles to the cupcakes:)



LuAnn found a design for a castle cake in her Betty Crocker kids cookbook. At first, Andrew had been pretty sure he wanted another Godzilla cake (that would have been year 3), but when he and Granny brainstormed cake ideas, he thought the castle cake was a great idea.



Here's the chef and her #1 decorator...



Granny baked and assembled, and then the kids got to help add the crenelations.





Some frosted ice cream cones doused in sprinkles became the towers, and pieces of chocolate bars made the windows and drawbridge.



Here's the happy birthday boy with his granny!



Friday night, the kids had fun racing around the yard with our new giant croquet balls.





Here's Gandad with his kiddos...



And Granny gets a snuggle too.



Having fun playing together!



This is the basswood tree we planted for Andrew just before he was born. Now at 6 years old, they've both grown so big!



### **Andrew's 6th birthday party at the beach (2011-07-26 04:26)**

Andrew's sixth birthday party was held (again) at Tenney Park Beach. Having a June birthday makes for such easy party planning! Pick a park, invite some family and friends, get a pinata and a cake, and voila - party:)

After arriving, we set out the food, and of course, the beautiful castle cake.





Andrew is seeing the finished product for the first time. Granny added two knights at the front and a castle-destroying dragon at the back.



Here's the dragon, tearing down a wall of the cake-castle.



What a great birthday cake. I wouldn't be surprised if Sylvia requests her own castle cake come next February.



Andrew did a nice job of hosting his party this year. Here he is with his best bud from school - Jayquan.





Two buddies. Andrew's missed his friend this summer!



Here are some of the girls working on a sand castle. I told Andrew he could invite six friends. In addition to Jayquan, he picked Alivia and Rayna and Eli and Celia. So sweet!



Here's a sweet pic of Andrew and his dad.



Andrew has a loose tooth! You can see that the grown-up tooth is coming in right behind his front left baby tooth.



The kids had a lot of fun clambering around on the monkey bars!



Bryan and his mama.

2558



Here's me and Kathy. Thanks to Bryan's dad for taking the camera for a bit to get some photos of me at the party!





There's me with my dad and Bubs.



Lighting candles at the beach can be a bit of a trick. There was a breeze, and the candles wouldn't stay lit, but we contrived a way to block the wind long enough for a new six year old to blow them out.





Here's our crew. My friend Samara happened to be at the park, so her daughter Anika (who knew Andrew when they were both babes) joined in for the pinata fun. Then there's Alivia, Celia, Eli, Andrew, Jayquan, and Rayna in the front.



Everyone got a turn whacking the pinata horse, and then Eli (I think) broke it open. Andrew got the final turn to blast out the candy.



Here's the kiddos gathering their candy horde.



There's pretty Alivia.



And Sylvia opens her up as she goes.





Looks like Alivia was quite successful in her candy gathering:)



Party decor...  
2564



Uncle Bubba was the chief party entertainer. He helped Andrew and Eli and Jayquan happily play together. And he was jungle gym extraordinaire.





There's me and Lisa.



And one of the few pictures of me and Bryan occupying the same frame...



There's me with both my dads and my bro.



To everyone who joined us, thanks for making the party a fun time! And for those of you farther afield, thanks for the birthday wishes and loving presence you are in Andrew's life. He's one happy and lucky 6-year-old boy:)

## Summer outing with Granny and Grandad (2011-07-27 06:57)

Bryan's parents were in town the weekend of Andrew's birthday party, and we all had such a nice time together! We played ball in the yard, played Quirkle in the evenings, ate some good food, and went on an afternoon outing to Olbrich playground and gardens. Here's a few of the pictures from our time together. Thinking back (it's been a month), I just have a contented smile come to mind when I think about our weekend.

Here's cute Sylvie...



Me and my sweetie. We've been married 12 years!





Looks like Sylvia's having Rodan fight the new dragon.



Here we are at Olbrich park. We enjoyed a picnic (compliments of the left over birthday party food), and we lay on our backs watching the sun shine through the trees. Andrew and Sylvia climbed all over the playground, we played frisbee, and even tried out Andrew's new purple soccer ball.



There's me and my birthday boy.



There's me and my strong girl.





Grandad and Sylvia walk through the gardens hand in hand.



Andrew and Sylvia love to play on the hosta leaf sculpture at the entrance to the gardens.



If we had unlimited funds, I'd have something similar created in our yard. It can be a slide or a ship or a cave or a snail. The perfect play area for kids.

Here Andrew and Sylvia sit on top.



Love those kids!



Sylvia walks on Bryan's feet.



There was a patch of sunlight shining directly on this hydrangea. So beautiful with the dark and the light.





We took a tram ride around the gardens (I learned a lot from the tour). En-route, Andrew took a couple pictures of LuAnn. Love that he got her from his perspective:)





Thanks for a fun visit! Today (July 27), Andrew and Bryan are heading down to Texas for the week. It's Andrew's summer visit to Texas, and this year, he requested that it be a boys week. So Bryan will be working remotely during the days and hanging out with his sweet parents in the evenings. They should have a blast! Thanks for a fun visit, Granny and Grandad!

#### **Fairy time (2011-07-28 06:12)**

On a bright and breezy June afternoon, I pulled out Sylvia's fairy canopy and hung it from our front yard tree.





Here's a picture of me in December 2007 getting the canopy for Christmas just before Sylvia was born. It hung over her crib until she was old enough to pull on it, and since then, it's been in storage, waiting her her to be old enough to hang it again.





I loved seeing these kiddos enjoying a quiet lunch under the purple gauze of the canopy. We sat still and listened for the sounds around us, and we all went around and shared something we'd noticed that day that made our hearts glad.



So pretty!



Here's pretty Celia. Sylvia looked at this picture and noted that she looks kind of sad. I just think it's hard not to get lost in those big brown eyes.



Here's a picture I love of my Eli and Celia. I printed it as a float wrap and gave it to Jessica for her birthday. Such beautiful little people!



A couple days later, it was my 34th birthday! Bryan and I went to American Players Theater and saw a great production of Taming of the Shew. Thanks to Bubba and Lisa for watching the kids while we had a great night away.

One of my favorite parts of a play at APT is the pre-dinner picnic. Bryan got us set up with some delicious cheeses, wine, hummus, bread, and fruit. It was a great birthday!





## 7.8 August

### Firefly hunting with Grace and Tim and John (2011-08-08 09:00)

We have a standing visit with our friends Grace and Tim and John over the 4th of July weekend ever year. Here's some pictures from the past: 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and now 2011. Whenever we get together, we eat lots of good food and have lots of fun.

Here we are sitting down to a meal inspired by the trip Grace and I took to Arizona in the spring. It's Bandera's Macho Salad ([recipe here](#)) and cornbread ([recipe here](#)). Please note, that Bryan has asked me never to make a different corn bread again, ever. This recipe is as good as it gets.



I made strawberry Shaum Torte for dessert.

Here's the recipe from my mom and before her Tekla Loeber (that's my mom's maternal grandma...I think).

## Ingredients

1 cup egg white (preferably room temp)

2 cup sugar

1 Tbsp vinegar

2 tsp vanilla

Heavy whipping cream sugar

Fresh strawberries

## Directions

Beat the egg whites with mix master until foamy but not firm. SLOWLY add two cups sugar. Then add the vinegar and vanilla.

When very stiff, turn onto an ungreased spring form pan.

Bake at 275 degrees for 1 hour

OR

gas oven: preheat to 500 degrees. Put torte in oven, close door. After one minute, turn off oven, leave door closed, and torte in oven for 3 to 8 hours.

electric oven: preheat to 400 degrees. Turn off after 10 minutes, leave in 3 to 8 hours.

Fill with whipped cream and sliced, sweetened strawberries.



The kids had fun chasing fireflies in the yard. Sylv got dressed in her firefly costume from Halloween last year.



This is one of my favorite pictures. He's about to catch a firefly...and it's even lit!





There's Grace and Tim, looking relaxed:)



Summer evenings are just the best!





Here's Andrew with a firefly on display.



Sylvia the firefly hunting for her brethren.



John and Sylvie intent on the capture.



They were all very gentle with their insect prey.



Two buddies in 2011. I think we need to start feeding them!



She's so cute!



Can you see the little firefly above her outstretched fingers?





So cute:)



It's been over a month since our visit, but the memories are still fresh and bring lots of smiles to my heart. Thanks,  
2590



Grace and Tim and John for coming out to see us!

### **Biking with John (2011-08-12 08:47)**

When our little buddy John was visiting, the boys did quite a bit of biking. John rode Andrew's bike (sans training wheels), and Andrew rode on the tag-along behind Dad. Off they went for adventures in Madison!



Two boys, ready to hit the road.



Did I mention that they are goofy boys?



Boys and Dads, ready to roll.







Grace, Sylvia, and I picked up the boys at Tenney Park and then we all drove over to Michael's Custard on Monroe Street for lunch.



What a big guy he is, doing a long bike ride on his own legs!





Yummy hamburgers.

2596



After lunch, we went and got ice cream. That, my friends, is a mess for another post.



#### **Ice cream time (2011-08-13 06:47)**

There's nothing like some frozen custard on a summer day. When Grace and Tim and John were visiting, we all enjoyed a treat from Michael's. The kids really got into their food.



That's one contented girl!



Me and Grace!





Andrew and John got cones. They are a messy, messy way to eat ice cream!



Notice that in this picture, Andrew's ice cream is still in his cone...



Here's my favorite 2011 picture of John and Andrew. They look a little like they have chocolate pirate beards!



What cute boys:)

2600





**July 4th (2011-08-14 06:55)**

Our 4th of July (eeks, that was over a month ago!) was full of low-key fun. Andrew, John, Bryan, and Tim all played a lot of soccer in the yard with Andrew's new soccer goal and ball.



There was some fancy footwork going on out there!



It was Boys against Dads, and those boys were really hustling.



Meanwhile the moms were engaged in other 4th of July pursuits..





After soccer, it was time for some water play. Slip and Slide!



Tim cools off:)



Now the boys are holding onto water balloons. These water balloons have the unique ability to not pop when thrown at a person. They only seem to pop when they hit the earth. Makes for interesting, bouncy game of water balloons!



Kids in the tree. This is the little volunteer maple that's starting to become a substantial tree!



Dinner on the picnic table.





For dessert, Red, White, and Blue (with hot fudge and sprinkles).



Yummy, yum, yum.

2606



After a long day, Tim reads the kids a bedtime story.



I like how they're all snuggled up together:)



After the kids were in bed, Grace, and Tim and Bryan went to Monona to watch the fireworks. I stayed home and photographed sparklers.



I put the camera on a tripod and ran about the yard...





Hope your July was a good one!

**Day with friends (2011-08-15 06:14)**

Before Grace, Tim, and John left, the boys wrote their dads letters detailing their soccer wins.





It's so fun to see what good writers and readers Andrew and John have become:)



I love that kid:)



Here's Grace and me just before I took them back to the Milwaukee airport.



We ran out in the yard to get a few last pictures of us with our kiddos.



Our realllly "special" kiddos.





Thanks, Grace and Tim, for visiting! We loved having you here, and we're looking forward to our next time together!





**First lost teeth (2011-08-16 06:26)**

When he was about 7 months, old, Andrew's first two teeth came in...his bottom two. Here's a picture of him in January 2006. There were some sleepless nights associated with the arrival of those teeth (see a January 31, 2006 post here).





By March 2006, those two bottom teeth were all grown in. Oh, what a cute baby he was!



And on July 5, 2011, one of those first teeth was ready to come out. Here's a picture of the wiggler and of the adult tooth coming in behind.



Last picture of Andrew with all those hard-earned baby teeth. After this, he and I went to the bathroom, and at his request, I pulled that baby tooth out. He was so excited. You can see it in his eyes!



Here's my newly minted "lost my first tooth" six year old.





And there's the gap...



Here's Sylvia demonstrating her teeth as well. The next morning, when Andrew was about to discover a couple quarters in his lovely granny-made stegosaurus tooth pillow, Sylvia fell off the sofa. Her top left tooth was knocked a little loose and now it's turned a shade of grey. We'll see if it lightens up again. I'm just hoping that it

doesn't need to come out!



Alivia recently lost her first top tooth. So we've got two gap-toothed smiles in the yard these days.







What cute kids these guys are!



Since I'm a month late in posting this tooth update, we've had a new tooth development. Andrew's other bottom tooth loosened. Here's his last picture with that bottom right tooth. You can see that his first adult tooth has really grown in...



Again, he and I headed into the bathroom, and I gave it a tug. Now, as of August 8, he's lost two teeth. What a big boy!



### **Door County beach play (2011-08-17 06:46)**

In early July, I had a great assignment to travel up to Door County to photograph Rutabaga Paddlesport's Door County Sea Kayak Symposium. We'd had that weekend blocked off as a potential family vacation in Door County, so we combined the two. Bryan took care of the kids while I worked, and then I joined them for some outings to beaches and playgrounds. It was a great weekend! One of the highlights was sitting around the campfire as a family.

Here are some photos (taken with my phone since I was "camera'd out") of Bryan and the kids playing in the water at Sand Bay Beach, which was just down the road from the Wagon Trail Campground where we stayed.





Here's one of my favorite pictures from the summer:)





















Here's a picture of the kids asleep in the tent. Such cuties.



On Sunday, before we left, we visited Newport State Park.





The beach was a lot rockier, but we found lots of crawfish exoskeletons, which made for some fun hunting.







There was a spot where the sand was almost like quicksand. Andrew and I had fun letting our feet get swallowed up.



Homeward bound. Two tired kids!



**The many expressions of Sylvia (2011-08-19 06:13)**

My Sylvie-girl is amazing. She's dramatic and a shining, gregarious star. She sometimes gets shy and unhappy if people look at her or comment about her. She sparkles and spins and illuminates the room. She demands an audience. And she needs time to herself to recover from life's small injustices. Here, she was putting on a dance show for me. She requested photography.



Love this picture of her open face.



Dancing with the brown-haired twin.





Suddenly, not so happy.



Her dolly is dancing too:)



Dancing and spinning.



Dramatic dance-finish



Carefully positioned. Her expression here just cracks me up.



Practicing some of her ballet moves.



I love how she can channel some of her intensity. She's so self-contained in this picture. That, right there, is my girl.







Now the other twin has come out to join the dance.



I just love the way Sylv's lips pout out.



My sweet Sylvie.



While Sylvie was putting on this show, I was sitting on the sofa next to Andrew, who was reading books and applauding alongside me.



Boy do I feel lucky to get to see my kids do their thing and grow into themselves. Hugs to both of them:)

**Silly faces (2011-08-20 06:01)**

We're never going to be able to run for public office.

Here's one of the things our family does for fun...take silly pictures of ourselves with the phone. Greetings from us to you from Door County!











## Lake house (2011-08-25 11:37)

The weekend of July 22, we joined our neighbors, Kathy, Brett, Alivia, and Rayna at Kathy's family's lake house in Waupaca. A really great time was had by all.

There's something so quieting about the pace of life in Northern Wisconsin. On a lake. In the summer.

Here's a slide show of the weekend!



There's the blondies, hair kissed by the sun.



In the evening our first night, the kids all played on the pier.





I have a picture of Andrew and Alivia from 2009 that I love.



Here's the 2011 version. While Alivia was gazing at me with her amazing yes, Andrew was being a ham...



I love the way he's looking at her in this picture.



Here's Rayna by the birch trees in amazing evening light.



This is Andrew and Kathy and the pooch Freya enjoying the sunset.



Water time! We spent all day on the water.



Here's the view from the shore to the floating dock where we spent the day. Andrew and Alivia and Rayna  
2658



jumped and jumped and jumped off that dock. I kinda wish I'd had my camera to document the wonderful water play.



Mid-afternoon, we went for a boat ride on the pontoon boat. The big kids read, Rayna napped, and we all enjoyed this beautiful chain of lakes.



Here's a view back to Kathy's dad's house from the water.



And the sunset...



Thanks, guys, for inviting us out for the weekend. We had a wonderful time. Kathy, it was great seeing where you grew up and getting to experience a place that's been such an important part of your life. We'll join you back there any time!



## Circus World! (2011-08-28 17:27)

My dad is a lot of fun:) For the last few years, he's given the kids outing-type birthday gifts. One year, it was a trip to a Mallards baseball game. Last year, he took Andrew to the Railway Museum for a train ride. This year, he took both kids to Circus World in Baraboo.

Andrew and Sylvia were pretty excited. Here they are checking in...



We spent a little while walking around the museum part of the grounds. The kids were pretty impressed with all the costumes and spectacular circus props.



As you can guess, Sylvia was a big fan of the Cinderella carriage:)



Here's Andrew and my dad checking out the miniature circus.



They had a whole dress-up corner, where Sylv made herself at home. Here she is wearing one of the costumes and gesturing quite emphatically.



Love the light in this picture of my mesmerized girl:)



After visiting the museum, we headed over to the Hippodrome for a perfectly-sized circus.



There were clowns and a ring master and contortionists. It was a really nice-sized show.





Here's the silly Pekinese dog act. Here's a 2010 newspaper clip on the circus.

David Rosaire, whose "Perky Pokes" have performed the world over, is an English performer whose trained dog act turns 50 years old this year.

SaLoutos said the act had been developed by Rosaire's mother, then passed on to Rosaire in 1960.

Besides the Pekinese dogs in the original act, Rosaire has added a great Dane, a "very naughty" show-stealing mutt, and even a baboon.

"He's the best dog act working in the world right now," SaLoutos said. "It's amazing that we've got him."

Married couple Slava Byhkan and Kristina Nuss, of Belarus, perform acrobatics both as a team, and in individual acts, with Slava performing a precarious "rola bola" balancing act across increasingly unstable stacks of metal cylinders. Kristina's hula hoop act is part of the "Ring of Illusions" show, which features illusionist Crist and a host of additional circus performances.

"We've actually put a couple of circus acts into the big magic show," SaLoutos said. "It's a touch of circus in the magic, and magic in the circus."





You can tell that Sylvie is having a good time!





Really cool hoola hooping dancer...



Here's Heidi Herriott & Lady Dancer performing an exacting equestrian routine.



This couple from Belarus did a great act. He's on the "rola bola," see-sawing all over while they juggle.





Here's two girls and an elephant named Tiny.



Andrew took a ride on the elephant afterward.



And Sylvia chose to take a ride on a pony.



She had fun with her steed.





We took a ride on a very, very old carousel.



There's Andrew and his grandpa.



And here's a nice picture of Dad with both kids.



Enjoying some ice cream treats before we headed home. Thanks, Dad, for a great day!



## 7.9 September

### Dreaming of world travels (2011-09-02 06:45)

A few weeks ago, Bryan, Andrew, Sylvia, and I sat around the dinner table, and we started brainstorming places in the world that we would like to visit. Bryan pulled out a paper and pen, and here's what he documented:

- Go to Africa and get a house...maybe for a couple years (Andrew)
- Go to China or maybe even Asia (Andrew)
- Ride a yellow horse (Sylvia)
- Tanzania (Althea)
- Horseback riding trip (Althea & Sylvia)
- Australia/Great Barrier Reef/New Zealand
- Costa Rica
- Other side of the world (Andrew)

- Riding on a kangaroo (Sylvia)
- Alaska
- Hawaii (Althea)
- Philippines (Andrew)
- South Korea (Bryan)
- Brazil (Andrew) - Natal city (at this point, we were looking at a globe)
- Russia (Andrew)
- Egypt (Althea)
- Norway (Bryan)
- India (Althea and Andrew)
- Canada (Bryan)
- New Mexico (Andrew)
- Algeria (Andrew)
- Argentina (Andrew)
- Fiji (Althea)
- Thailand (Andrew)

Wondertime magazine (may it rest in peace) published an article several years ago about a family who saved their money and took a year-long round-the-world vacation. I think I prefer the idea of occasional trips rather than one gigantic one, but the story has stuck with me. Here it is (Around the World in 52 Weeks). The same magazine (oh how I loved it!) had a story about a family who traveled all over Africa with their baby. Again, inspiring!!

Exploring different places and cultures is something that Bryan and I would both like to do with our kids while they are growing up. I hope we're able to put some plans into action so that we can make some of those traveling dreams reality!

### **First day of first grade (2011-09-06 06:38)**

Andrew had his first day of first grade last Thursday. He was excited:)



There's something so neat about seeing your kid open and ready to tackle the next challenge. Andrew just loves school, and he was excited to be in a classroom with his best buddy, Jayquan, and he was excited to be a first grader!





In the last few weeks, people often asked me if Andrew was excited about going back to school. I had to give a qualified answer. He was excited, but Andrew is (at this time) a kid who experiences life very much in the moment. He doesn't tend to anticipate things too much (positively or negatively). He said he was looking forward to school. He smiled when we talked about it, but he never brought it up.

However, on the morning of - his excitement bloomed forth:)



I don't think I can tell how much I love this kid. Except perhaps you can tell from these pictures a little bit of my adoration:)





For comparison, here's a photo of Andrew's first day of Kindergarten...



Here's Andrew's buddy, Alivia on her first day of second grade.



There's our blondies...





Andrew's teacher is Maestra Samaca. Here she's greeting her new classmates.



Here's Andrew and his good friend Jayquan.



There was lots of hugging:)



Have a great year of first grade, Andrew!!

I like how they start school on Thursday. That gives them two (short) days, a three day weekend, and then a four day week. Seems like a nice, measured start to the year. My boy's looking forward to heading back to the classroom this morning!

### **Ishnala (2011-09-07 06:51)**

When Andrew and Bryan were in Texas in late July, Sylvia and I went out to dinner at Ishnala with Terry and Tom. For those of you not familiar, Ishnala is a supper club in the Dells. It was built in the 1950s, and the feel is still much the same. Before dinner, we always enjoy some drinks and a walk around the property, looking out over the beautiful, wooded Mirror Lake. The restaurant itself has amazing views of the lake and the woods, and there's a lot of ambiance - trees growing up through the middle of the restaurant and stuffed taxidermic models of critters hidden here and there.

It's a special place, and it is fun to bring my own kids here to experience it!

Here's a picture of Sylvia (in her new outfit) exploring the grounds.



And here's our group on the patio. Can you tell that Sylvia's feeling grown up?



Looking out over the lake.



Reflections



Inside the restaurant, Sylv got a little bored. But she did really well.





There's Terry enjoying his dinner.





And Tom...



At the end of the evening, we're heading back to our car.



Such beautiful cornfields in late July.



I kinda like this picture of Terry driving. He's at home in the driver's seat.



There are five sandhill cranes flying low over the hills and fields. Ahh, summer!



**Sylvie in the summer (2011-09-08 06:53)**

My Sylvie girl had a good summer. She's starting up preschool at Monona Grove Nursery School this fall, but I thought it would fun to look back at some of the fun she had over this long, play-filled summer.

2688

Here she is back in July on the zoo's carousel with her friend CC.





And here are two girls on the choo choo train.





Two girls in the kangaroo's pouch.



Two girls checking out the bears.



Here are a few pictures Bryan took...maybe last fall...I just pulled them off our little point-and-shoot camera. Here's Sylv playing with her food and doll.



Dress-up with Andrew.

2692



Such a little goofy girl!





You can tell by her lopsided hair, that this picture was taken after the Great Haircut of October 2010.





I don't even remember this. Bryan got this image of them making up beds in the back yard last fall.



And here's Sylv posing with dress and crown...



Back to the present! Here's August 2011, a nature camp at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center with Celia.



Here's a few pictures from an outing Sylv and I took to the Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee with my friend Anne. Here Sylv is checking out some of the critters.



They have a great slide there that Sylvie loved going down.



What fun!



This girl of mine amplifies our lives with her energy and enthusiasm. She's such a joy to watch grow!

### **Bryan's trip down the river (2011-09-09 06:02)**

I know that it's September now, but take yourself back to early August. I've got some catching up to do on blog posts, starting with our weekend trip to Jack's house. This blog post is brought to you by the fact that Sylvie's still in Texas (I'm writing here on Sept 6) and Andrew's in school. Oh the blessed quiet! How I've missed you:)

To set the stage...it's Thursday evening, August 4 - around 80 degrees. Bryan just got back home after a week with Andrew in Texas. On this day, we're all packed and heading out to Jack's house for our family's annual Wisconsin River float weekend. Joe's flying home from DC. Maretta and Kyle are driving down from St. Paul. Michael is coming from work in Dodgeville. Terry, Tom, Bryan, the kids and I are all driving from Madison.

The car is full of amazing food, our camping gear, flowers, the kayak, and a happy crew. We've extended the weekend by a day. Turns out that driving out on Thursday night instead of Friday night makes the whole weekend feel so much more expansive, relaxed, and wonderful! On our drive out, we stop at Peck's Farm Market like always. Then we drive out to the bridge in Muscoda where Bryan unloads his kayak and camping gear and heads to the river for a solo overnight paddle. The weather was a little rainy, but as we parked, we saw this lovely rainbow.





There's Bryan putting in at the Muscada bridge.



He's heading down river 30 miles or so to Jack's house. Goodbye!



Bryan brought his camera with him and took some fun images of the sandbar on which he camped.



Nothing like watching the sun set over the water.



Here's a campfire he made.



Beautiful! Bryan's sure enjoyed kayaking this summer! I was glad he was able to get out on the river and explore a new (to us) section of the Lower Wisconsin.



I'm writing this in early September. We just got home from an overnight canoeing trip we did with Andrew where we covered some of this same section of river. It's so tranquil and lush. I feel peace just being there:)

### **Weekend at Jack's - Day 1 (2011-09-10 06:11)**

Ahh, summer! This picture of Andrew with his smiling watermelon says it all.

On Friday, August 5, we started the day with a big breakfast and then we headed on the river for our first float of the weekend. When we got back, Terry and the kids broke open the first of the watermelons.



Smashing a watermelon on concrete and digging it apart with your hands is a strong Babler/Haller tradition. In this case, however, it looks like a knife was used.





Mmmm watermelon!  
2706



Pictures of me are mostly curtesy of Joe!



There's Bubs



Maretta-with-the-short-hair and Bearded Kyle.



Here's dinner - Macho Salad. yum.





That pan's full of delicious corn bread.



Tom and the kids.



We ate dinner outdoors up on the hill. Here's Andrew giving a sweet kiss.

2710





There's Matt. We were glad that he was able to join us this year.



Maretta and Sylvia. Not sure what Sylvie is doing here except perhaps displaying how her thumb bends back just like Daddy's. Natural selection:)



Enjoying our dinner with some bourbon slush and watching the sun set.



Kids in motion.



Lots of laughter.

2714



Our summer crew is a big one, so we tend to sleep out in our tent. It's fun to camp with the kids! We had some big storms, but we didn't blow over, and somehow the kids are now a little less afraid of thunder. Excellent:)





Stay tuned for Day 2!

### Jack's weekend - Day 2 (2011-09-11 06:18)

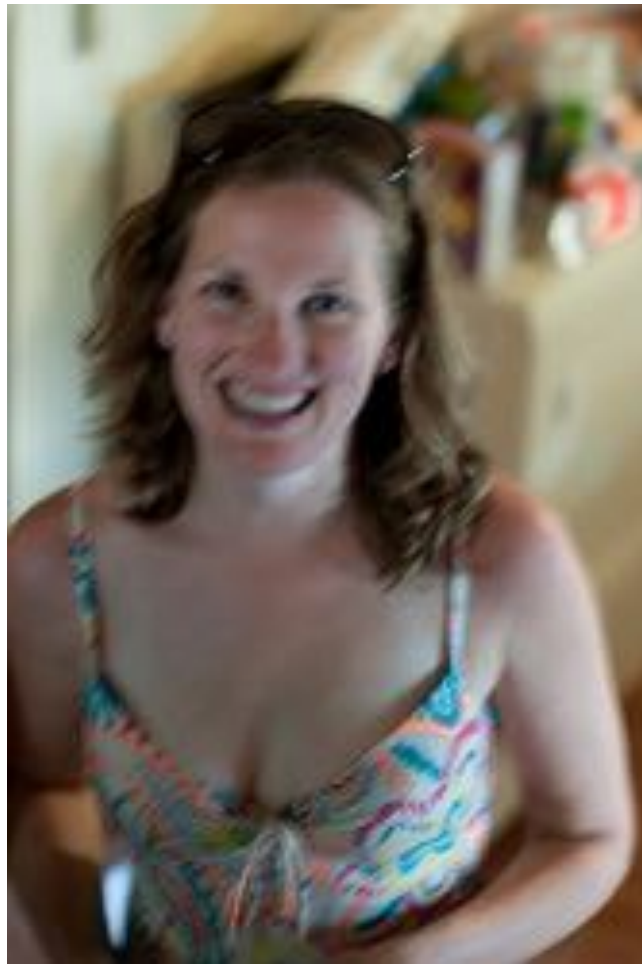
The cornerstone activity of our summer float weekend at Jack's is the Saturday float. We all don our life preservers, drive upstream a couple miles, wade into the Wisconsin River, and float our way down to Jack's. Here's our 2011 crew in the obligatory pre-float photo:



Michael is either playing with Andrew or abusing him.



This year's float took a little longer than normal, and we should have brought some sunscreen on the river for a mid-trip re-apply. Oh well!



Such a cute kid:)



After the float, there's reading and napping.



Maretta brought her new spinning wheel, and here she's letting Sylvie help her work the treadle.



Mid-afternoon, Jack to me and Dad and Matt up the hill to take a look at the prairie.





There's no place like Jack's prairie. I just love it!



The big bluestem grasses are tall. You can see the bluffs across the river in the distance.



Some bee balm.



Prairie, oaks, and the river beyond.



Back at home, Mareta's spinning. Actually, in this case, she's taking two strings of yarn and winding them together. That's called plying.



Her new spinning wheel is so beautiful. I love watching her change fiber into yarn!



Saturday night, we took our jambalaya up on the hill for dinner again.



As the sun set, the moon became brighter in the sky.



Good food, a fire, and a beautiful (bugless!) evening.





Bev was approaching a significant birthday, and Jack wrote a declaration for her, which he read with some pomp and circumstance amidst much laughter.



And so ended our second day. We played Trivial Pursuit well into the evening, and woke up with cozy kids in our tent.

### Jack's weekend - part 3 (2011-09-12 06:26)

Our family is pretty big into traditions and routines. At Jack's, we eat the same foods and do the same things. And in a way, that makes the whole experience feel a little like Christmas. Excess eating, lots of laughter, knowing exactly what comes next.

On Saturday night, we had peaches and buttermilk biscuits with cream. Yum! Here, Jack's helping prep the peaches.



We've been having some big issues with which version of Trivial Pursuit to use. Terry likes the original, but none of the next generation know any of the answers to those questions. The other versions we've tried have questions that are either harder or more stupid/trivial, so the debate continues.



Rolling and moving



Lots of ribbing of Terry and laughter.



Sunday morning, we lay out the final breakfast feast. Bryan's making French toast.





I love this picture of me and my siblings, but I feel like a midget. Mental note, I should stand in the middle...



Hugging goodbye before Maretta and Kyle head back home to Minnesota. A moment with Joe and Kyle.





Maretta and Terry



Pretty plant outside Jack's front door.



Maretta says goodbye to Andrew and Sylvia





For the last four years, I've brought a bouquet of flowers in memory of Mommy. She is so much a part of this weekend, and her absence deeply felt. Mommy, we miss you.



On Sunday late morning, Jack drove his truck up to the high prairie so we could all take a look.





Sylvie doesn't like the "shiny sun." My glasses seem to help.



Andrew's tired out from an active weekend. He's sleeping in the bed of the pickup truck on Bryan's lap.





We have pictures over the years of Michael and Joe up on Jack's garage (the back side of the garage is close to the ground for easy access). Here they introduce young Andrew to the tradition.



So ends Jack's float weekend 2011. Time spent with my brothers and sisters fills me up. Thanks, guys, for a great time!

### **Joe's August visit (2011-09-13 06:31)**

My posts this week are harking back a month to early August. Joe flew home to Wisconsin from DC for our weekend at Jack's, and then he stayed a few extra days. The kids and I really enjoyed hanging out with him!

Here's a couple compromising pictures of Joe riding Uncle Kirk's tractor from the 1950s.



We took Joe with us to swimming lessons, and one day, we visited the beach and the zoo. Here's Joe on the carousel.



Andrew's riding a caterpillar.



Sylv is on the otter. I love how she gives her mount a kiss when she gets off.



Here's Joe helping his nephew and niece see the tiger.

2740





One night, we met up with Michael and Tom and Terry and Dad and had ice cream at Michael's. Then we played at Wingra playground and walked down to the lake.



Everyone got in on the swinging action. Except me. I get sick.







Sylv looks like she's feeling a bit torn up inside.





Walking down to the water.

2746



What a pretty night!



There's Dad and kids and bubs on the pier.



You can feel summer ooze out of the image below...



There's Tom and Joe and Terry enjoying the view. Joe, it was so fun having you visit! Come back soon!



### **Silly at the pool (2011-09-14 06:28)**

I'm writing this on a chilly September morning, and the idea of being in the pool seems waaay to chilly. But looking at these pictures, I can remember those August days with a smile. Andrew and Eli were both in Level II at the Monona pool, and the girls were both Squirts. I asked the boys for a "buddy" picture. Eli was more into the idea of a "zombie" picture. I've got to say, this sequence makes me laugh.







Not one to miss out on some silly action Sylvia joined the fray. Love this picture of her:)



Hopping up on Andrew's back, the boys look a little more normal. Goofy photo grins, but less zombie-esque.





There's Jessica warming up a wet CC. We sure had a fun August session of swimming lessons at the pool! One of my favorite parts of summer.





### **Last swimming lessons pics of the season (2011-09-15 06:35)**

In practice, getting the kids to swimming lessons is often more complicated than it seems in my mind. I imagine warm days of flipflops and swim suits...parking my car at Jessica's and walking down to the pool together amidst a gaggle of happy kids. Somehow, it seems that at least one kid is mad or hurt or doesn't want to go or wants to be carried. In my mind, the green trees and flowers sway in the wind as our pool bags sway in our hands. We walk and catch up and breathe in the summer. In practice, this often means suppressing eye rolls as one or more child bemoans an injustice or dawdles far behind or has a scraped knee.

We're often late, and it's usually not as easy as I imagine, but still, going to swimming lessons is one of my very favorite parts of the whole year. I L.O.V.E. love it. And when I'm not soothing or threatening or cajoling or comforting or consequencing we're all smiles.



Post-swim, the kids like some "toaster time" while wrapped in their towels. They're both getting so comfortable in the water.

Thanks, Joe, for these pictures of my kids and me. I love 'em.





On the way to the locker room, the kids are spreading out on the ground to bask.



Here's a couple pictures of Andrew by Joe. Silly guy!







So long, Monona pool! See you next summer!

**Play date with Olivia and Hailey (2011-09-16 06:41)**

Andrew and Olivia were at Monona Grove Nursery School together for two years. Here's Olivia in 2008. What a curly-headed heart-breaker she was!



Here's Olivia now in 2011. Love her energy!



Three kids on a hammock.



Hailey and Syliva will be in the same preschool class together this fall, and they've been in the same Toddler Time class at Monona Grove for the last couple years.



What a cutie! Love you guys:)





### **Snack Taxi's - Reusable snack bags for sale NOW (2011-09-16 12:40)**

The time has come (the walrus said) to talk of snacks and things...

Sylvia's preschool is selling some great reusable snack bags as a school fundraiser. I first learned about Snack Taxi bags a few years ago at a play date. The kids had been racing around the playground for a while when my friend Laura pulled some cute grape-filled bags out of her purse and handed them to her hot kids. I hadn't been so prepared, and thankfully, her kids were willing to share with mine. Laura said the bags were machine washable and worked great - the nylon interior is easily cleaned...so I went home and ordered a few of my own. Since then, I've been steadily increasing our stash. I love 'em!





I can't begin to count the number of times we use these bags when we leave the house with a bag of crackers or nuts or carrots or grapes. It feels good to not be throwing plastic baggies into the trash each day, and I think it sets a good standard for Andrew and Sylvia about not using disposable items - Reuse! Plus, all materials are lead, phthalate and BPA free, and SnackTaxi is a mom-run business.

The Dotzour family currently owns two sandwich-size bags, four snack-size bags, and a cute napkin. I think we need to double that amount since Andrew takes a lunch three days a week and Sylvia is taking a lunch to school a couple days a week, so our rinsed-out bags don't have time to dry before they are needed again. Now, the question is...which patterns to buy (that organic fruit pattern is one)!



Monona Grove Nursery School receives 40 % of the proceeds from these sales, so you can place a big order, knowing that nearly half of it is going to support the creative, fun, and nurturing work of Sylvie's lovely school.

To order, click on this Snack Taxi link that will take you directory to the school's fundraising page. You might also note "Monona Grove Nursery School fundraiser" in the comments box when you place your order just to confirm. Your order is shipped directly to you. The sale is open through September 30, so don't delay. Thanks so much, and feel free to message me (adotzour@gmail.com) if you have any questions. Cheers!



### **Ballet class (2011-09-17 06:48)**

Sylvia loves her dance classes. She's always excited to go. Many costume changes ensue. On this, her last day of summer ballet class, she ended up going with non-dance clothes. Ahh well! That's what happens when you change 6-7 times before 10am.

Sylvie's dance instructor at the Y is Ari. She's wonderful:)



Stretching out...



Love all the tutus!





On the last day of the session, parents come in to watch. It's so fun to see how the different kids handle the audience.



Ari gives the kids some direction, and then it gives me a big smile to see how the kids apply those directions to their own movements.





Love the sweet expression on this little one:)



Sylv is thinking with her tongue here. Just like her mama.



And reach!



Awe...



They're all so earnest! It's adorable.



I love Sylv's long limbs.



This one might be my favorite picture of the session. Graceful teacher, practicing student.



Big steps!





Gazelle-like leap over the beanbag.



Jumping!



Some free dance at the end. I love this sequence of Sylv coming around and then jumping.





I was planning to have Sylvie take a dancing break this fall, but she wants to be signed up, so we're doing tap (and maybe ballet again) at the YMCA-NE on Tuesdays. I think she'll have fun!

### **Evening at Tenney Park with golden light (2011-09-18 06:52)**

On a beautiful evening in late August, we took the kids to Tenney Park. Our first stop was to New Orleans Take Out to get shrimp po'boys. We ate them on a picnic table and then took a walk out on the pier. That combo has been a Babler summer evening tradition for decades. And the warm light of the sunset was so beautiful on my boy as he frolicked on the rocks.













Sun drenched, with blond hair and bronzed skin...it was a great summer!

**Sibling time (2011-09-21 06:51)**

Andrew and Sylvia can be so sweet together. I just love those kiddos so much! Have I mentioned recently how cute they are together? Oh, they are:)

Andrew is such a kind and loving big brother.



Many days when Andrew is walking home from school, Sylvia will run down the street toward him, her arms spread wide. And Andrew then runs toward her, his arms spread wide. They meet half-way down the block in a big sibling embrace. Reminds me of the scene from the Muppet Movie where Kermit and Miss Piggy are running toward each other through a flower-strewn meadow. Makes my heart spark and pulse with happiness.



In and amidst the sibling squabbles, there's so much love and fun between these two. Sometimes when they're watching a movie and Andrew is feeling a bit worried, Sylvia bravely states, "Don't worry, Andrew, I'll protect you." And of course, he does the same for her.

Sometimes the two of them get laughing about something (often a bare bootie or a "sweet potato" as we oft refer to them), and they roll on the floor together, cackling and laughing so hard they can't breathe.

They play games where Andrew is the villain and Sylvia is the girl baby or Andrew is the pirate and Sylvia is the pirate baby. Or Andrew is a caped superhero and Sylvia is a tiny "born baby." See a theme? gaa gaa

Sylv enjoys having time at home by herself. Franky, I think she relishes the solo time. However, nothing beats having a cool brother to come home at the end of the day to play with her.

I'm so glad these two have each other. Love you, kiddos!

### **First sleepover (2011-09-22 06:28)**

On Labor Day weekend, Andrew had his first sleep over. He and Alivia had been talking about it for ages, and at last it seemed like the right time.

It was fun to have our Alivia girl over for supper. Afterwards, we roasted marshmallows.





I love her look in this picture!



These kids have become expert pepper harvesters. I planted six pepper seedlings this spring, and they've produced well. Bryan's made pepper jelly and hot pepper sauce, and the freezer is full of more to process!





I think they've only eaten one or two. They're not too hot, but I think they have fun daring each other to test the spiciness!



The next morning, I had to get a picture of these two buddies.



I have no idea what they are doing in these photos.







So glad that we have friends like these just down the street. Andrew and Alivia have know each other their whole lives. Well, at least Andrew's whole life. He's a year younger.



Petitions have been put in for sleepover #2. Since the first went so well, I think we'll be happy to oblige, but I've indicated my preference for no more than one per month:) They are counting the days until October.

Hard to believe that we have sleep-over aged kids!

### **Canoing on the Wisconsin (2011-09-23 06:32)**

Sylvia had a solo visit to Texas with Granny and Grandad over Labor Day weekend. Boy, oh, boy did she have fun! While she was enjoying some one-on-one time with her grandparents, we decided to take Andrew on an overnight canoeing trip - something we don't yet feel would be wise with Miss Sylv.

We packed up on Sunday and headed west from Madison. Bryan's friends loaned us their canoe. We left the canoe at Tom's place in Lone Rock, and then we shuttled the van downsteam to Blue River and left it at the Blue River bridge. We drove the other car back up to Tom's, and put in to the lovely Wisconsin River in the mid-afternoon.

It's so beautiful out there. So peaceful and gentle and serene. I ♡ the Wisconsin River!!

Andrew sat in the middle of the canoe on a milk crate, and he read Charlotte's Web or helped paddle or snacked or chatted with us. A couple hours later, we found a nice sand bar and stopped for the night.



Andrew helped us gather up kindling for our fire, set up the tent, and get our food all ready.



He also ran races with himself up and down the sandbar to that clump of willows below.



The sunset was so beautiful!



Photo by Andrew:)



Here's the three of us. Love.



Bryan got a good fire going, and he cooked up hamburgers.





This fire made some of the best marshmallow-roasting coals I've experienced in many-a-year. We sat up late together and watched the fire until it went out. Then we all snuggled in to the 2.5 person tent for a good night's sleep. At least, Andrew and I slept well:)



The next day, we loaded up and headed back down the river. We played lots of "In my father's grocery store" and "I'm going on a picnic and I'm going to bring..." games. We sang a little and snacked. Mid-morning, we stopped at this sandbar for a little running, cartwheeling, and snacking.



Is there a prettier landscape in all the world?



There's the boys with the canoe!



Happy kid!



Andrew finished Charlotte's Web in the mid-afternoon. We'd planned the trip to take us until about 1:30pm. And sure enough, at 1:30pm, we got to the Blue River bridge. But there wasn't a parking area where we thought there should be. Confused, we decided to press on, hoping that there was a second (??) Blue River bridge just around the next corner. Three hours of heavy paddling later, we made it to the next boat landing in Boscobel. It turns out that there's a big island in the middle of the Blue River bridge. We were only seeing one span, and what we thought was the shore was the island.



So we'd paddling an extra 12 miles or so to a place where our car was not. Fortunately, a nice retired police officer drove Bryan back to our van in Blue River while Andrew and I waited at the canoe. It ended up being a four-hour detour, but it all ended up just fine.

We got home around dark...tired and feeling good. Can't wait for more adventures like these with my family!

<Click on the map below for a bigger view of the route we paddled.>





**Sylvie at preschool (2011-09-24 06:25)**

Sylvia started preschool at Monona Grove Nursery School this month. She is L.O.V.I.N.G. it!





She's been tagging along as we took Andrew to preschool since she was six months old. For the last couple years, she's been longing to be allowed to play in the big preschool rooms, and now, at long last, it's her turn.



Sylvia is in Jodi and Sue's classroom. She's worn this Minnie Mouse costume every day.



Here she is playing with Sue.



Sylvie goes to ballet and tap class on Tuesdays, to Donna's house all day on Wednesdays, and then to preschool on Thursday and Friday mornings. It's a nice schedule, and I'm loving the new structure our weeks contain.

Here's a quick video of Sylvia on her way to preschool for her first day of Lunch Bunch. Such a cutie. She's loving life these days:)

[flickr video=6174256438]

### **Sylvie in Texas (2011-09-25 06:13)**

Sylvia had the great pleasure of taking a trip to Texas to visit Granny and Grandad all by herself over labor day weekend. Granny flew up to pick her up, and for most of a week, she enjoyed some solo time with her grandparents and Aunt Melanie.

As part of her visit, Sylv got to go to a real Texas boot and clothing store, and she got decked out!



There's my girl, sporting her new duds.



Happy Sylv with her Aunt Mel.



There's my girl riding Ginger. Giddy up!





Sylv got to bring home some new leotards...happy girl!

2806



All ready to head back home...



Granny brought Sylvie back home too! Here they are at the airport!



Cowgirl Sylvie's rounding up some orange critters at the airport.



It was so fun to watch Sylv come down the escalator after not seeing her for a week. That girl is fun to be around! Andrew was happy to have his sister back too.





Thanks Granny and Grandad for giving us a week-long break! It feels so good to know that Andrew and Sylvia get to spend time with you. It's hugely enjoyed by all!

## 7.10 October

### Jump around (2011-10-03 09:08)

Happy Monday morning. I know it can take a bit to get going on a Monday after a beautiful weekend, so here's a video of Andrew and Sylvia to help you start your day with a chuckle.

They're at a Badger's women's soccer game, dancing to the song Jump Around. Where they learned how to:

- shake their booties like that
- do the robot dance

I don't know:)

[flickr video=6169347753]

### **Pumpkin carving with Melanie (2011-10-31 09:43)**

Hello, and Happy Halloween!

It's been over a month since I last wrote a post, but all that's about to change. I've got 17 posts cued up, so throughout November, you'll get to see all the things we did in September and October! I usually post pictures on Flickr as-they-happen, so you can always check out my Flickr stream to get a sneak peek when there's a posting drought. My plate has been wonderfully...almost overwhelmingly full on the photography front this last month, and work gets priority over the blog:) But Bryan's sister, Melanie, visited us last weekend, and I want to share pictures from that visit. So you'll get a peek at our last few days before jumping back to see the colors of September.

As I type, I'm looking out my window at our beautiful maple. It's a deep golden. The leaves are damp, and the sky is gray, and somehow that seems to deepen and enhance the saturation of the colors. It almost takes my breath away, it's so deeply beautiful:)

We were all delighted to have Melanie fly up to Wisconsin to visit us last weekend, and as always, we had a great time playing together. We watched the last game of the World Series, played Quirkle Cubed, went to a Badger Women's hockey game, joined some hordes of costumed kids on State Street and saw Wayne the Wizard do his Halloween magic show, went for a hike at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center, and in general, just enjoyed being together.

Since today is Halloween, I thought I'd share some photos of yesterday's pumpkin carving...

Here's Bryan and Andrew working on a little pumpkin. They're pounding golf tees in it.



Here's our work station.



Andrew's carving a pumpkin face for the first time.



Cute little triangle nose.



So proud of his handiwork!





Now Sylvie gets a turn.





Andrew and Melanie carve a detailed witch scene into this big guy.



Sylv with the finished pumpkin product.

2816



Mel worked hard on this one, and it looks great!



Photo-taking



Our 2011 Jack-O-Lanterns. The one on the right Andrew designed (see his picture), and I cut.



Here's Bryan and his sister. [?](#)

2818





It'll be fun to put lights in the Jack-O-Lanterns tonight and to see them decorating the front porch as we do our neighborhood trick-or-treating rounds!

## 7.11 November

### Hiking with Aunt Melanie (2011-11-02 09:07)

During Melanie's visit here last weekend, we enjoyed a walk at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center. We had two fearless trail leaders to blaze the way. One of them was sporting a new princess dress made by Granny as her Halloween costume.

Here Sylvie is jumping from stump to stump in a circle...a favorite and long-enjoyed activity.





Love this blue sky. Still lots of leaves on trees, but we're seeing more and more bare branches.



Melanie's hair is so pretty in the sunshine. It shines like copper!



Here's our crew (minus me!).



There's Bryan and Mel on a pier on the pond.



I just love the way that the dried flowers glow when back-lit by the sun. Such a different look from their summer blooms, but really just as striking.





New favorite picture of Melanie and Bryan in the woods.



She wasn't really taller than him...just standing on a rock:)



I love the energy in the look that Andrew and Sylvie are giving each other. Wonder what they were talking about:)





Other new favorite picture!



Melanie with her niece and nephew.



Princess Sylvie running down the path.



Here's Sylvia and Andrew sitting on the dock...



...and a few minutes later, Melanie and Bryan. Sibling mirrors.





Such beautiful color!



Pensive princess examining the foliage.



Leaping and running!





Getting a lift from Aunt Mel



Spinning!!! Sylvie's hair is really quite long when it's not all bouncing up in curls:)



Mel and Sylvie under a red maple.

2832



Melanie taking a picture of Bryan and Sylvie.



That's what I've got for photos of our time with Melanie. We'll see her again at Christmas, which in some ways feels

like a long time, but those two months of November and December are probably going to fly by! Thanks for coming up, Mel! We love you. xoxo

### **Apple picking (2011-11-03 06:33)**

Some years we make it to the apple orchard a half dozen times or more. This year, we only went thrice. The mosquitoes were non-existent, which was such a better situation than the blood-sucking horror of last fall. We ate lots of apples, drank cider, but made not a cobbler, pie, or even apple sauce. Oh well...my friends did! And I made a few Dutch Babies (recipe here) with cooked apples on top. Delish!

Have you ever noticed that I love hand-holding pictures? They're my favorite:)



Cute boy!





Love this picture of Sylvie. It's so completely her.





Happy girl with her apple.



Both kids love to get boosted up in our arms or on our shoulders to reach apples high up in the branches.



Mr. Andrew man with his bag. I heard that our main orchard - Door Creek - ran out of apples by early October. Must have been lots of crowds and an early season!



A little sibling love in the orchard.



"Is this what you want us to do, Mom?"



We said "hi" to the Black Welsh Mountain Sheep before heading home. Oh, that cider we had was excellent. I love waiting all year and then enjoying cup after cup of the rich, crisp deliciousness of fresh apple cider from the orchard.



Until next year!

Althea



## Badger's Soccer (2011-11-04 06:35)

In an ongoing effort to expose the kids (Sylvia) to girls who are strong and athletic and awesome, Bryan got tickets to women's Badger hockey, volleyball, and soccer games this fall.

A major draw is the candy:)

I was photographing a wedding, so I didn't attend this game, but here's some pictures of the kids having fun watching the girls play. Sylvia has a poster of the soccer team on the wall of her room, and Andrew has the team picture stuck to the ceiling above his bed (!!).













And here's a video that I posted a while back that showcases some of Andrew and Sylvie's stellar dance moves.

[flickr video=6169347753]

### **School this fall (2011-11-05 06:37)**

Here's Andrew, with his first grade teacher, Maestra Samaca. He's so happy about his classmates, and I'm just so thankful that school continues to feel to him like a huge treat that he gets to do five days a week. He goes to school with a smile on his face and comes home with a happy glow.



I'm going to be volunteering in the classroom once a week during the class they have in English - Geology. Andrew is so excited that I get to come to his school and he can introduce me to his friends. They've been studying rocks in science class - looking at them with magnified glasses, getting the rocks wet and letting them dry, scratching the rocks and seeing what happens. Andrew tells me almost every day that he loves being a geologist!

Here's a video of Sylvia walking to school the first week. She is loving her preschool class with Sue and Jodi - she goes in the mornings twice a week and stays for Lunch Bunch. I can't tell you how happy she is to finally be a big girl and get to go to school all by herself.

[flickr video=6152999242]

She's also been going to daycare at Donna's twice a week this past month, and then she has ballet and tap on our free day. Given my heavy photography workload this fall, it's been a great schedule, and Miss Sylv is just thriving on the many activities.

### **Purple jacket (2011-11-07 06:39)**

I just wanted to share a few pictures of this beautiful purple jacket that Bryan's mom made for Sylvia. It's so cute, I kinda want to hang it on my wall. Oh, and there's a matching hat that I've been remiss in not photographing. You'll



have to trust me when I say it's adorable:)



After not wanting me to touch her hair for years, Sylv is not letting me put it in braids or pigtails from time to time. Soooo sweet!



There's our girl. She's off to Donna's for the day! Chow sweetie!



### **Minnesota Renaissance Festival (2011-11-08 06:42)**

In late September, the kids and I drove up to St. Paul to visit Maretta and Kyle for the weekend. Bryan was in New York having a fun weekend with his dad. Saturday was Kyle's birthday, and Maretta and Kyle took us to the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. My siblings have been going to "Ren Fairs" for years and years. They all have costumes and swords, boots, mugs, capes, and jewelry. But somehow, I've been absent from every Ren Fair visit. I think they started going just about the time that I left home for college. Anyway, it was my first visit, and it was a lot of fun!

Maretta and Kyle's roommates, Raderlee and Salsa are part of a fire troupe called the Fandazzi Fire Circus (here's a video of them from YouTube). We really enjoyed watching a couple of their shows!



Here's a skit between Robin Hood and Little John. Lots of pole fighting!



Sylvia's wearing Aunt Maretta's fairy wings and necklace. Andrew brought his Darth Vader costume just to be silly.



There's the birthday boy and my sister with her short, lovely hair.





Andrew wanted to take pictures, so I let him...here's his portrait of Mareta...



...and here's one of me.



Michael and Lisa drove up for the weekend too, and we met them at the fair.



All the rides and activities run without power (what a nice contrast to traditional fairs!). On this ride, the Magical Butterfly Carrousel, two people pushed an axle that spun the carts.



Sylvia had a blast!  
2852





And we had fun watching her!



Here's the scene in the games and rides area. I loved all the beautiful wooden medieval buildings! The tower is a climbing wall that caught Andrew's attention.



Up he goes!



As I was backing up to take this shot, I fell backwards over a hay bale and landed flat on my back. The camera was well protected, and I couldn't stop laughing. Everyone wondered why I was suddenly on the ground!



The kids also got to do a pony ride. Andrew's horse was Bullseye...



Can't remember the name of this pretty girl. Sure is fun to get a chance to ride on a horse! Anyone know of a place around Madison where the kids could take lessons on a gentle pony?





We ate good food and saw a couple other shows and wondered through the extensive fair grounds.

That evening, we had a great steak dinner with Maretta, Kyle, Michael, Lisa, Josh and Betsy, and their new little babe.

Thanks to Salsa and Raderlee for letting us use their room while we visited, and thanks to Maretta and Kyle for being such fun hosts. Maretta got Lucky Charms for breakfast. Ahh, good times:)

xoxo

### **Backyard football (2011-11-09 06:44)**

One afternoon in September, I asked Jessica to watch my kids for a bit while I did some photography. When I came to get them, I found Eli (in red) and Andrew (in yellow) engaged in a heart-felt game of football with Mitch. This remains one of Andrew's favorite play times of fall 2011.

2856



It seemed that a huge part of the playing of football was the celebrating of runs.



There was helmet knocking, hugging, high-fiving, and extreme happiness. Can you see Eli's missing tooth (it didn't get knocked out during football play).







Love the earnest looks on these boys' faces.



Watch out, boys, it looks like Mitch is coming through!



He's broken through the defensive line!!



Did Mitch make it to the end zone? Perhaps. I'm pretty sure, though, that the helmeted players carried the day.





Ahh, and now some well-deserved nourishment - a made-from-scratch caprese sandwich. I love this picture of these two friends sitting. Together. Both so dear to my heart.



## Early autumn and red shoes (2011-11-10 06:48)

Autumn has been my favorite time of year. This summer, I was pretty sure that summer has now won the title as now my favorite season. In May, I'd say it's spring. When the air is soft and the trees are full of a painter's pallet, it's hard not to feel like fall is #1.

Here are some pretty flowers Bryan brought home for the table. Beautiful autumn sunset colors.



And here's the trees in our neighbor's yard. They're some of the first to turn.



Here's our sedum plant 'autumn joy.' When I worked at Carleton College's Off-Campus studies office, my co-workers Margit and Andrea sometimes brought in beautiful bouquets from their garden. One that impressed me the most was a late fall bouquet of these beauties. So I planted some in my own yard:)



The silver maples against the blue sky. What a perfect marriage of colors.



Here's our September yard. The raking projects haven't yet begun, and the temps are in the 80s!





Here's me on my hammock enjoying the fall day.





Here's my girl, swinging from her swing...also enjoying the fall day. Looking at pictures like this, I have no doubt why I like to be at home with the kids.



And my favorite picture of September (my computer screen's background)... red shoes, orange skirt, flying.



**Autumn neighborhood walk (2011-11-11 06:50)**

Here's a little peek of our neighborhood color on the first week of October. We're at the tail-end of color now, so it's fun to look back to see the riot of reds and greens and oranges from just a month ago. That's one thing I love so much about spring and fall...you need to look and appreciate things now - then they're gone.



I like this image with the green and yellow trees reaching across the road to touch. Like friends holding hands.





Walkin' down to the preschool.



Then heading back. As the wind blew, yellow leaves tumbled from the trees like snow.



The kids kick and rustle the fallen, golden snow.



So much fun to run through leaves!





I feel really lucky to live in such a beautiful neighborhood. There's no time like the autumn that makes me appreciate all the big, beautiful, mature trees more.







### **Pumpkin patch (2011-11-12 06:54)**

My dad and I took the kids to the Eplegaarden orchard and pumpkin patch while Bryan was on a Kickapoo River kayaking trip last month. We collected apples, discovered pumpkins, and braved the crowds for a fun visit. Andrew was so strong, he even carried a gallon of cider all the way back to the car!

Here the kids were exploring the scarecrow set-up they had.





Sylvie was fascinated with the clothes.





They had a horse drawn carriage that passed us twice. I just love the hugeness and solidness of those hooves!



Sylvie, Andrew, and Dad check out some over-fed, soporific goats.



Looking for apples, and getting a snuggle.



It works so much better to turn your subjects so you're shooting into the sun. Then you avoid all that sunlight-and-shadows-on-the-face nonsense...and you get some pretty rim lighting.



Hunting through the pumpkin patch for the perfect pick.





The kids did a full examination of the fields of pumpkins before settling on a couple to take home.



Thanks for a fun outing, Dad! Glad we got to do that together! xoxo

## Andrew's new bedroom (2011-11-14 06:57)

Andrew and Sylvia got new beds this fall. Since he moved out of his toddler bed, Andrew's had the lower trundle from the bed I had a kid. I kind of wanted Andrew and Sylvie to share one bedroom and have the other room be a play room. But Sylvie really needs her own space when she gets mad - which is still a lot - so after discussing it, we decided to keep two separate bedrooms. However, we'd already talked about bunk beds, and Andrew was pretty keen on (read: committed to) the idea.

The bed itself was back ordered for a month, but in October, it came in, and I'm so happy with how it looks! I took all the wall hangings down and re-hung them in places that I liked. For the past four years, they've been hanging in spots where there happened to be nail holes in the walls, and it felt nice to put things together in a more cohesive way.

Andrew's room looks nice and big since I took these pictures with a wide-angle lens - actual dimensions are (12.75' by 9.5'). (Sylvia's room in contrast is 9.5' x 9' square.)







I'm so happy with how this guy's room looks! It feels nice to have pictures on the walls in a nice configuration (the blue fabric square is from Joe's trip to Sri Lanka and the tapestry is from his trip to Ecuador). The water color drawings up around the top bunk used to hang in the living room, but Andrew liked the idea of them in his room.

He's slept on the top bunk since the bed's second night here. And Sylvia has in turn slept on the bottom bunk. It's fun to have these two munchkins falling asleep and waking together. Good for sibling bonding:)

And I'm so happy to have these rooms furnished and arranged in ways that makes my heart glad. Happy big boy room, Andrew!

### **Sylvie's room - before (2011-11-15 06:16)**

Here's Sylvie's bedroom when she still had her sweet toddler bed. Oh, so cute!





Tucking her dolls in to her bed and into their crib.





Here's her dresser (now with the mirror removed, it's Andrew's dresser), and the bookshelf in the spot where it's been for the last 6.5 years.



Big girl with her pacifier in her little bed for just about the last time.



Here's Sylvie's closet with the new double rack and the shoe shelving.



The dolls are in a rocking chair that came from my Grandpa and Grandma's house.



Some favorite Sylvia artwork on her door.



My girl's pretty fairies and flowers display.



Flower fairy letters on her wall spelling her name.



The view from her bed.





Then, out went the old bed, shift went the furniture, and voila! A new bed (with a small mattress for the the time being).





Stay tuned for more images of Sylvia's completed room!

### Sylvie's room - after (2011-11-16 06:18)

Sylvia's new room is all pulled together. I hung her fairy bower over the bed, I got a small 9-cubby shelf for her treasures, her dresser went into Andrew's room, the rocking chairs went away, and my grandma's secretary came in as her new dresser. It feels so colorful and clean and pulled-together! So happy with my big girl's room.



The basket in the corner is full of her dress up skirts, and I hung a mirror down low so she can see her costume changes. My mom did the needlepoint sampler over her white shelf, and Bryan and I put together the bird puzzle when I was pregnant with Andrew. The mobile hanging from the ceiling fan came from Bryan's parents in Israel.



Here's the view from the fairy bower...





I took the closet door off, which opened up some room for the doll crib to be at the foot of Sylvia's bed.





Weeks after putting it all together, I still walk into her room, smile, and sigh. It sure does make me happy to have sweet rooms for my kids.

### **Playing with Evelyn, Amalia, and Alex (2011-11-17 06:59)**

My friend Heather's little girl Evelyn was in Wisconsin with Heather's parents (her first solo visit!), and we got to join them for a play date at the Dream Park. Here's Sylvie, Evie, and Celia on the tire swing together.





There's Evie on the swings.



Three girls eating carrots on the playground bench.



We had a picnic, and the girls ate lots of pb & j sandwiches with grapes. Then toes and fingers got cold, and it was time to pack it in!





A few days later, Heather and Michael drove up to Madison from their new home in Indiana. They brought with them two little munchkins whom I <aaarrggghh> haven't yet met. Here's me holding darling Amalia. I was relieved that she looked like her pictures. It felt nice to recognize them. Amalia is a bit of a clone of her sister appearance-wise.



How lucky was I to have a baby fall asleep on me?

2892



Oh, the sleeping sweetness.



And there's Mr. Alex. Such a charmer and so full of personality. I love this little mister and all his sweet tiny fingers and toes!



Here's Amalia taking nap #2 of the morning in a sling.





The next day, I met up with Heather and her family to take photos with Heather's grandma. Such a treat it was to spend hours together! Thanks, Heather and Michael, for making the trip north! I'll try to get down to Indiana to see you this winter.

xoox

Althea

### **Breaking it down with Eli and Celia (2011-11-18 06:01)**

One afternoon in late October, we had Eli and Celia over, and all the kids engaged in a little dance show. The boys were caped wonders, dancing fiercely and courageously with ninja moves and powerful dances.



The girls seemed to prefer a more flowing dance style. Yet they still had a lot of power in their sometimes cute, sometimes where-did-you-learn-how-to-move-like-that (!! ) too-sultry-for-three-year-olds dance numbers.



Celia brandishes her cape with a flourish.



Then of course, there were the combined dances. Fortunately, there were no collisions.



Here's all the dancers after the final bow...



Jessica, it's so fun to watch these kiddos play and move and grow together over time. Thank you for sharing your amazing kids with Andrew, Sylvia, and me!

### **Ballet and tap - the cuteness pierces my heart (2011-11-19 06:05)**

Sylvia has been taking ballet and tap classes at the YMCA since January, and she L.O.V.E. loves it. It's actually a little hard to believe that dance class is such a relatively new part of our lives. My Sylvie girl just eats it up.

Parents get to come into the classroom to watch the last day of the session, so I was there again, cameras in hand. Ready to capture the unbelievable cuteness of tiny kids in leotards.

It was a bit remarkable for me to see Sylvia in a class setting. She was the kid who raises her hand ever few minutes to tell the teacher what's on her mind. And Ari was a very kind listener.





This one cracks me up...she wanted her foot touching Ari's during the stretches. This is a girl who adores her teachers.



Isn't this the sweetest thing ever? Here's all the girls holding hands.





And <ack!> my sweet one gracefully moving. I love the stretch of the fingers, the tilt of her head, the attention she's paying to her movements.





Oh, they're all so cute! And I love Sylv in the background here, wrapped up in her pose.



During the free dance, she was skipping about. Check out the tongue sticking out.



Attempting to skip across the room while alternating leading knees. She's thinking hard.



Ari's technique for helping the girls learn how to jump high is to be a tree and they are trying to pick the fruit off her hand. This is my favorite pic of the morning!



Wait, maybe these next two are my favorites. My chest has this involuntary heave when I look at her pointed toe and her straight fingers. Oh my, what a curtsy, Sylvie.







After ballet is tap class. The energy and movements are so much bigger, and Sylv was so delightedly caught up in the excitement of it all. An hour is a long time for a three year old to stay focused!



Think she's enjoying herself? She kept signaling for me to take her picture. Love this picture of the girl on the right too!







Ahhh, I hope you all enjoyed that as much as I did. If you need a cuteness fix, just bookmark those pictures so you can come back to them. They are sure to improve almost any day.

**Rest in peace, Grandpa Harvey (2011-11-30 12:24)**

Sad news to share today. Bryan's maternal grandpa, Grandpa Harvey passed away last night.



I feel really lucky to have married into a family with so many lovely people. And Grandpa (and Grandma) Harvey are two of the sweetest, kindest people I've known. Since I first met Grandpa 14 years ago, he's felt just like a grandpa I've always had.

I'm so glad we got to spend lots of years visiting and sharing the growing family with him. Here he is with baby Andrew...



And baby Sylvia...





Here's a cute couple of pictures of Sylvia and Grandpa playing together when she was 2.





Grandma Harvey passed away in May 2010 (you can read her funeral tribute [here](#)), and since that time, Grandpa's had a tough road. Losing his wife of 70 years wasn't comprehensible to him. I think he's probably glad to be at the end of his life's journey.

Here's the family together after Grandma Harvey's funeral.



And here's an image of Grandpa from our last visit with him this May. Sweet Grandpa, we sure will miss you. With both you and my Grandpa Babler gone, who's going to flirt and ask me to be his girlfriend? I'll miss holding your hand.



Here's a picture of Grandpa and Grandma when they got married in 1939.



Here's Grandpa and Grandma...still together 70 years later.



Whatever happens after life, I'm glad to know that Grandpa and Grandma are in it together.

More photos of Grandpa can be found in his gallery.





## 7.12 December

### **Almost Christmas! (2011-12-22 23:46)**

I wish I'd been posting more this month! The kids have been so adorable, and our calendar has been so full of fun Christmas-y activities! We're heading out to Texas in the morning, and while we're gone, we have some good family friends staying at our place. Feels good to have the bags packed, the gifts mailed, and to be all ready for the celebrating to begin.

Hope that wherever your Christmas takes place that you have a wonderful time.

### **Christmas Eve Scavenger Hunt (2011-12-26 16:17)**

Hope you all had a great Christmas! Here's a little video from a Christmas Eve scavenger hunt we all did.

<http://youtu.be/UQfLYORHMnU>

# 8. 2012

## 8.1 January

### Home again! (2012-01-02 13:01)

Bryan and I are back home after ten great days in Texas. I know I've had a good, long vacation when the idea of being back home again makes me feel oh-so happy. Bowser and Spook are really, really glad to have us home again too. Such affectionate kitties!

Wordpress, the platform on which I write this blog, just did a nice new upgrade. It made many things slicker and more streamlined, but to my dismay, it broke the plugin I use to pull my photos into blog posts from Flickr. I've tried a couple other similar plugins, but those too are broken. I'm hoping that all those lovely people who spend their time making plugins feel quickly motivated to solve this problem. In the meantime, I've got to figure out how to share pics. I can just upload them to Wordpress, but I've got this whole system with Flickr, and I try to make photo-stuff more automated rather than less!

...

OK, I just found a psuedo-solution, so I think I'll spend a little bit of my very quiet Monday, January 2 snuggling with Bowser (who's nestled on my lap in front of my laptop) updating my blog.



Happy 2012!

## Halloween 2011 (2012-01-03 07:58)

In January, I'm not too terribly interested in reminiscing about Halloween. For me, January is a time for cleaning house, slimming down, and getting an handle on all those things that fell through the cracks during our busy Christmas season.

Well, my first order of business was to bring my blog posts up to date. And that's when I realized that I didn't write a post about Halloween. So there weren't any pictures of Andrew and Sylvia in costume. For heaven's sakes, that just won't stand. So here at dotzourfamily.com, the standard mode of operating has shifted. I used to walk around composing blog posts in my head. Something would happen, and I would feel all twitchy until I wrote it down. It was an "as it happens" kinda blog. I also spent time writing blog posts that were less about what was happening and was more about what I was thinking. Personally, I'm more interested in reading blogs that fall into the latter camp.

However, in the recent past, my blog posts provide framework to photos. They're written to record the passing of events in our lives and to share stories about our days with our far-flung family and friends. But...perhaps because my mind and energy is so heavily invested in my photography business...my blogging is much less about keeping me sane by sharing rich stories and reflections. I do like to write, so maybe one day the wheel will turn and I'll go back to that mode of blogging.

In this current photo-oriented mode of blogging, I edit and upload pictures to Flickr as the events happen. Then when I feel motivated and have a chunk of time, I write a post about each event. The time is now. From October 31 - January 1, lots has happened. Many photos have been taken. And they will now be shared on this blog. Stay tuned day by day!

\*\*\*\*\*

For our first post (note the new, larger photos!), you can see Sylvia-the-princess trick-or-treating at Donna's on Halloween.





This little girl's dress and veil were made by Granny. So cute!





Aunt Melanie had helped us make our pumpkins.



Here's our trick-or-treating crew, Sylvia (pink princess), Rayna (witch), Alivia (scary bride), and Andrew (Darth Vader).



It's always fun to visit our neighbors on Halloween! There's Cindy.



And here's Jenny...





Andrew and Alivia have the trick-or-treating etiquette down pat.





Here's our sweet neighbor Mary.



This year for the first time, we ventured a bit beyond the confines of our dead-end street. We went around the corner! We have about nine neighbors that we see every year. And Andrew, Alivia, Rayna, and Sylvia are the only kids who generally trick-or-treat on our street, so they get special treatment. But this year, we trick-or-treated from some unknown neighbors. The kids are getting bigger!

Our tactic with Halloween candy is to let the kids eat as much of the stuff as they want on Halloween. Post-trick-or-treating, there's a bit of a gorge. The kids combined all their candy and munched away on their favorites. Then after they went to bed, I put about 80 % of the candy in a bag for Bryan to take to work. The remaining candy went into a bowl in a hidden, high spot. The kids got to take a piece out after each meal (including breakfast!) for the next few days, and then, remarkably, it disappeared without a whisper.

Such cute kids! It's fun to have Halloween traditions that we all anticipate and enjoy together.

### **Girls in New York City (2012-01-04 07:11)**

In early November, Bryan's mom took me to New York City for a girl's weekend. No kids, no husbands, just us two girls hanging out for a weekend on the town. It was so much fun!



I had been to New York a few times when I was in high school, but my last visit there was close to (good heavens!) 20 years ago. I loved walking around and feeling the energy of the city.



Our hotel was just off Times Square, and we walked around at night and during the day. I was amazed by the flashy signs, the variety of shops, the height and complexity of the buildings. Wow.









We went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and I loved spending the day wandering around the galleries. I must make a point of going to museums more often.

I was a bit surprised to see a painting of my sister...



Such a beautiful museum!



After our museum wanderings and a reviving lunch at the museum cafe, we headed out to Central Park. Such a beautiful place! We hadn't meandered far before we spontaneously ran into my friend Jennifer. What are the chances!?! We had plans to meet for dinner the next night. Jennifer recently moved to NYC from Lake Tahoe, California, and it was so fun to meet up and stroll through the park together.





My friend Noa Green is a photographer who does sessions in Central Park (click her to see some of her beautiful work). Now that I've been there, I'm feeling a little jealous!! What trees and light!







LuAnn and I went to a couple Broadway shows. Our first was Wicked. I know I'm a bit late to get on the band-wagon, but I LOVED it! I immediately got the sound track and have been a bit, er, obsessed. I loved musicals so much back in high school. It's been a long time, but the love remains.



We spent quite a bit of time wandering around town. The churches are oh-so-beautiful!



Sunday morning, we hung out at the base of the Queensborough Bridge and watched the first of the NYC Marathon runners come past. It's so inspiring! And the crowd was so pushy!



We wandered Macy's and Bloomingdales and several toy stores. We saw skaters at Rockefeller Center, ate lunch across from the Plaza, found cute delis and delicious sushi. I even saw a rat in the subway. What a New York experience!

Sunday afternoon, we got to see Jersey Boys. What a show! I loved the music and the theater of it all.





Such a treat! Thanks so much, Mom, for a really memorable, remarkable weekend. xoxo

### **Thanksgiving 2011 (2012-01-05 07:46)**

November was a super busy month for me photography-wise. I'm a little surprised to look back to see how few pictures I took of my own kiddos that month. The ebb and flow of life:)

We were home in Madison for Thanksgiving this year. Joe was visiting us from Washington DC (I first typed that he was home from Washington DC...where is home?). Maretta and Kyle came to town. Heather & Michael were in town with Evelyn and their twin babes, Amalia and Alexander. So great to have everyone together!

Here's Terry and Amalia enjoying a little snuggle.





Kyle and Michael examine Terry's periodic table. They are such science nerds:)



Evelyn is adorable, don't you think?!



Michael prepares Party Potatoes.



Bryan and Maretta look dapper and beautiful.



We had 16 people for our Thanksgiving meal this year. We shared meal-creation duties and spread out Terry's lovely home.







Our menu?

appetizer platter Dad

turkey Althea

ham Althea

cornbread stuffing Lisa

party potatoes Michael

gravy Althea

rolls Althea

sweet potato casserole Lisa

pink salad Kyle

steamed broccoli Tom

cranberry red pear relish Connie

pumpkin pies with whipped cream (2) Althea

pecan pie Althea

egg nog Gary

wine Jack



After our afternoon meal, we spent the rest of the day hanging out and enjoying being together.



In the evening, a game of poker broke out.





Some of Terry's rock and Ukrainian Easter Egg collections.





Sylvie enjoying an afternoon of iPad time.







Where was Joe in these pictures? Not evident. In any case, he was there!

### **November playtime at the Nature Center (2012-01-06 07:10)**

While Joe was home, we took Andrew and Sylvia to the Aldo Leopold Nature Center.

First we did our obligatory jumping around the stump circle.





Then our trail leaders were off and running.





Love this pic of Andrew and Sylv with their Joe.





Here's my favorite silly girl.



When they're around their uncles, Andrew and Sylv spend a great deal of time upside down or in the air.











We played some fun games of freeze tag too.



Joe, it was so much fun having you home for the week! I really, really value the times we get to spend together. xoxo

### **Getting our Christmas Tree (2012-01-07 07:21)**

It's a little funny to be writing this post after Christmas has come and gone, but better late than never!

We went to get our Christmas tree the weekend after Thanksgiving. We'd thought about going to a tree farm to cut our tree this year, but Andrew wanted to go back to Jung's (I think he was hoping for a post-tree visit to

Culver's). These kids are rapid tree deciders.



We picked out a Douglas Fir again this year, and we named it Ferb after Andrew's favorite cartoon, Phineas and Ferb.





Sylvie is happy about getting a Christmas tree! She's practicing her high knee skipping.





Melted my heart to turn around in the car to see Andrew and Sylvia's fingers intertwined over the top of the tree. Life is more fun with a sibling to share it with!



We got Ferb home, and while Bryan draped it in lights, I pulled out all the boxes of Christmas decorations and our Christmas plates. Bye bye fall, hello Christmas!



She's loving this, isn't she. It melts my heart.



What a fun, decorated tree!





It's pretty fun to be three years old at Christmas time!





Bryan put up the outside lights, and poof! our home was ready for Christmas.





My mom had bought a bunch of Bitty Baby/Bitty Twins outfits, and I pulled out a few for Sylvia. So the twins (Linda and Rose Crystal) got Christmas sweater outfits and Evie got a polar bear snow suit. Thanks, Mom! Sylvie loves 'em.



### **Visiting Wichita (2012-01-09 07:17)**

We took a driving trip to Wichita for Grandpa Harvey's funeral. It was one of the first long drives (12 hours) with our two kiddos. They did great!

On the way down, we left around supper time and drove until late. Then the next day we only had about 7 hours. The way home we did in one long stretch, and remarkably, the kids were wonderful.



Of course, they didn't often look up from the iPad/iPhones. My bags of books and coloring books and toys went mostly unused, but so long as everyone's happy, it's alright with me! I read a whole novel:)





We had a nice time staying at Grandma Jo's house. Grandma Jo (Mark's mom) has moved to an assisted living home, and it was nice to bring her back to her old digs to hang out for an evening. Sylvia liked the tutus and other props she found in Grandma's closet. She and Grandma share a flair for the dramatic.



Sylvie shows Grandma Jo her favorite app - Wash my Cat.



There's the lovely lady:)



Enjoying some time together:)



Now Aunt Melanie gets a tutorial.





Seems like there's always lots of laughter when we're together.







While the reasons for our visit were sad, we really did have a wonderful time visiting with family. We got to spend time with Bryan's cousins and aunts and uncles, and I have lots of fond memories from our time together.



Andrew and Sylvie were great travelers, and I'm looking forward to taking more driving trips in the future.

### **Ballet & Tap - last class of the year (2012-01-10 07:43)**

Sylvia started taking ballet in January, just before she turned 3, and she's been enjoying her dance classes every week since the beginning. Ballet costumes are a regular attire item here in our home. In recent weeks, she's decided that she's ready for a change of activities, though, and so this December class was her last dance class for some time. Next season, we're trying gymnastics!

Here's my ballerina...





Can I just admit here that there is little photography I've enjoyed more than photographing all these little girls in these end-of-session dance classes?





Balancing on one foot for several seconds...



This is one of my favorite pictures of Sylvie ever. I love how she's thinking and how strong and beautiful she looks in motion.



Now on to tap class...





These photos below look neat in a horizontal storyboard.









She's on the move!





Learning to grapevine. A good life skill.



Oh, sweetie. She breaks my heart with how fully herself she is. Love.



### **In Texas for Christmas (2012-01-11 07:58)**

On Friday, December 23, Bryan, the kids, and I flew down to Texas for a Christmas visit together. The house was so beautiful, the food so tasty, and our time together so fun. What glowing memories!

LuAnn played the piano at church on Christmas morning. Here she's doing a little lovely practicing for us.



It's so much fun to walk into a beautifully decorated home. So many pretty details to discover! The kids remembered all their favorite games, costumes, and activities, and the moment we arrived, they set out to review them all:)



This, my friends, is the fudge bowl. I love fudge. Love, love, love. Whythankyoui'llhaveanother.





I'd call this a full fridge. Salivatingly full.



On Christmas Eve, we made a variety of finger foods for our meal. Shrimp and veggies and fruit and cheese balls and Swedish meatballs and quesadillas, oh my! It was a good way to celebrate Christmas Eve:)



Finishing up dinner in the kitchen together.



The spread... ho ho ho!





### Gingerbread houses (2012-01-12 07:02)

One of our Christmas Eve activities was gingerbread house decorating. Granny had baked and assembled two gingerbread houses...all blank and anticipating the sweet decorations of my chillens.





Can you imagine their eyes when they saw the bowls of candy, candy, candy?



While Granny piped the icing, the kids gleefully stuck on the decorations.



Don't mind if I do help myself to a taste of that yummy frosting!



Careful consideration of candy placement.



They made windows and doors.





A yummy candy cane door...



Andrew even made a skylight.



Happy activity!



He's having fun!



Everyone's having fun!





Sylvie enjoyed some candy snacks between decorating shifts.



What pretty houses they made. In the next day, Sylvie's house added a lot more candy. She learned that she was allowed to eat the candy off, so she wanted to put a lot more candy on. Smart cookie:)



Something tells me that we'll be making gingerbread houses again.



Sweet, fun times.





Bryan got into the action and decorated a gingerbread cookie.





Which Sylvie wanted to eat!



Thanks for the fun idea, Granny! Gingerbread houses were a hit!



### **Christmas Eve frolic (2012-01-13 07:23)**

On Christmas Eve, Grandad put together a really fun scavenger hunt for all us kids. I spent a quiet December morning putting together the videos that Granny shot with the photos I took to make this Scavenger Hunt video.

<http://youtu.be/UQfLY0RHMnU>

After the prizes were uncovered (the traditional Christmas Eve pajamas), the kids were full of excitement and glee, and they danced together around and around and around.







Then they went to the kitchen to get some cookies and milk for Santa.





And then they gamboled together again.





Oh those two...they really crack me up!

Here's my favorite picture from Christmas.





And a quick posed photo (with the obligatory sibling-neck-squeeze) in front of the fire place.



Ahh the excitement of being a kid on Christmas Eve. It doesn't get much better than that!

### **Christmas morning (2012-01-14 07:03)**

On Christmas morning, I woke up around 7 and came out to the living room. Mark and LuAnn were sipping their coffees, the fireplace candles were lit, and it was all peaceful. No kids up yet! So we sat in cozy contentment together, gazing at the now-stuffed stockings, and waited for the young ones to awake. Andrew came out with salutations of "Feliz Navidad, Granny, Feliz Navidad, Grandad, Feliz Navidad, Mommy!" Then he snuggled up in my lap and we hung out together for a while. I mentioned something about Sylvia waking up at some point, and Andrew disappeared. A sleepy, Sylvie groan came from the bedroom, followed by a more lively waking-up sound. In a moment, two kids were gazing up at the stockings.





After we gave the OK for them to go wake up Melanie and Dad, the unwrapping of presents began. Usually we go around taking turns unwrapping. This year, the pace was a bit more, uh, frenetic:)



Sylvia got a Vidia and Rosetta fairy!



Ooo, new dresses from Aunt Mellie!



Here's a video of some of our present-opening:)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/adotzour/6570808323/>

Andrew has been requesting a toy called BeyBlade. I'd never heard of it before...but his friends at school love them. After doing a bit of searching, I found out that they are battling tops. Actually, they're really fun! I got Andrew a couple, and we all had fun battling them in their special arena.







Each top is a little different (these two are called Galaxy Pegasus and the Meteo L-Drago). I think the object of the game is that the last top spinning is the winner.



Fun to spend Christmas Day together, playing with toys and eating lots (and lots) of fudge:)

### **Christmas day (2012-01-15 07:10)**

LuAnn played the piano at the Christmas Day church service this year. It was so fun to watch and listen to her! Great carols and hymns:)

When we got home, Sylvia dressed up (outfit #15) into Granny's Belle costume. I thought she looked so sweet playing on the piano!



Our Christmas Dinner was in the evening. Granny made a beautiful crown pork roast with an amazing cranberry pecan stuffing. I've got to get this recipe. That stuffing is the stuff that dreams are made of.

Here's the main course, coming out of the oven...



What a beauty!



Oh, yummy, yum, yum.



And fresh rolls!





Mark and LuAnn's friends BJ and David joined us for Christmas Dinner. They were both a lot of fun! Note, they are sporting the necklaces Sylvia made:)



Here's David and Mark carving the roast.



Sitting down at the beautiful Christmas table.



On the outside, looking in...







Christmas lights from the street. Sylvia was a bit concerned to know where I was going. You can just see her head peeking around the open front door.



"Come in, Mommy!" She's jumping up and down:)



After dinner, Sylvia got to eat some of her gingerbread house for dessert. Note, it's become heavily more decorated!



Thanks, all for a wonderful Christmas feast.



### **Hanging out in Texas (2012-01-16 07:17)**

After Christmas, Bryan and I spent a couple days hanging out with the family before venturing out on our own vacation. I thought I'd share some pics from our fun times. There's a video at the end of Sylvia playing with an electric car that's pretty cute.

This is actually on our flight to Texas on the 23rd, but I had to share these pictures because the kids were looking so silly.







Andrew had a "blue raspberry" lemonade. He was so proud of his blue tongue!



After Christmas, Melanie gave us all some new holiday beer toppers. Reindeer and santa hats:)



A perfect poker combo.



Bryan got sick on Christmas Day and he was out of commission most of the 26th, but by the evening of the 27th, he was back in the game...the poker game.







I don't know if I can count the number of "tubbies" that Sylvia took while at Granny and Gradad's. I'm guessing it's around 4 per day.



Bryan and Mark went golfing in the balmy Texas weather.



Here's a cute video of Andrew and Sylvia playing with a motorized car. I like how she gently pats it when it stops and then runs gleefully away. So cute.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/adotzour/6620678983/>

### **Hill Country, Texas romantic get-away (2012-01-17 07:22)**

On Wednesday, December 28, Bryan and I packed our bags, said goodbye to the family, and drove west for a week of vacationing together. After a stop in Austin for a delicious lunch at Z Tejas, we drove on to Fredricksburg, TX, a beautiful German town in the heart of the Hill Country.





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[View Larger Map](#)

We stayed in a cabin at a beautiful little resort called Barron's Creekside.

First thing we did was to stroll around the grounds.





I love this shadow picture of the two of us!









The cabins are made of timber from a tobacco barn and the windows and doors and some furnishings are from a home in Switzerland. The owner, Daniel, is Swiss and splits his time between here and there.



There's my handsome sweetie.



And there's me, feeling quite relaxed and happy.



Our cabin was named Wasserfall. What a wonderful place!











Our first morning there, Bryan brought me breakfast in bed and then we lazed around and read for half the day.





We enjoyed some delicious dining in Fredricksburg (the Navajo Grill was super yummy), but my favorite meal was the steaks and mushrooms and asparagus that Bryan made on the grill. We moved our table out to the porch to eat by white Christmas lights.



Ahh, and the fire in the fireplace! So cozy!





This was one of the best trips we've taken together. We visited Becker Vineyards (bought some port and lavender honey), went to Wild Seed Farms, drove past the very crowded Enchanted Rock State Park, and wandered up and down the adorable shopping street in Fredericksburg. I loved it here, and highly recommend both the location and also the solo vacationing sans kids!

### **Exploring the Hill Country - by horseback and stream (2012-01-18 07:31)**

On Friday, December 30, we woke up early, packed our bags, said farewell to Barron's Creekside, and drove down to Bandera, Texas for a horseback ride at Dixie Dude Ranch.





I'd called around, and our trail ride was actually arranged by Marci and Russell Tiner from Cross T Ranch. They bring their horses to Dixie Dude Ranch and offer rides on their land.

I felt like a kid, I was so excited to see the horses when they pulled up. I sold Cold Snap back in 2002, and I don't think I've ridden a horse since then. Made me oh, so happy to be near them!



I was on a steady, smart thoroughbred named Earl, and Bryan was on a half-Percheron, half-quarter horse named Archie. They were both sweeties and needed almost nothing from us as riders:)



We rode for around an hour through scrubby woods and rocky gullies.





It was windy but sunny and very pleasant. I'd love to come back and do an overnight ride someday!



Signs of the longhorns.





There's me and Earl!



After our ride, we drove down toward San Antonio. On the way, we took a scenic road (thanks to a book we got for Christmas) and stopped at a nice little nature park.



We wandered down to the stream and saw some beautiful Cypress trees.











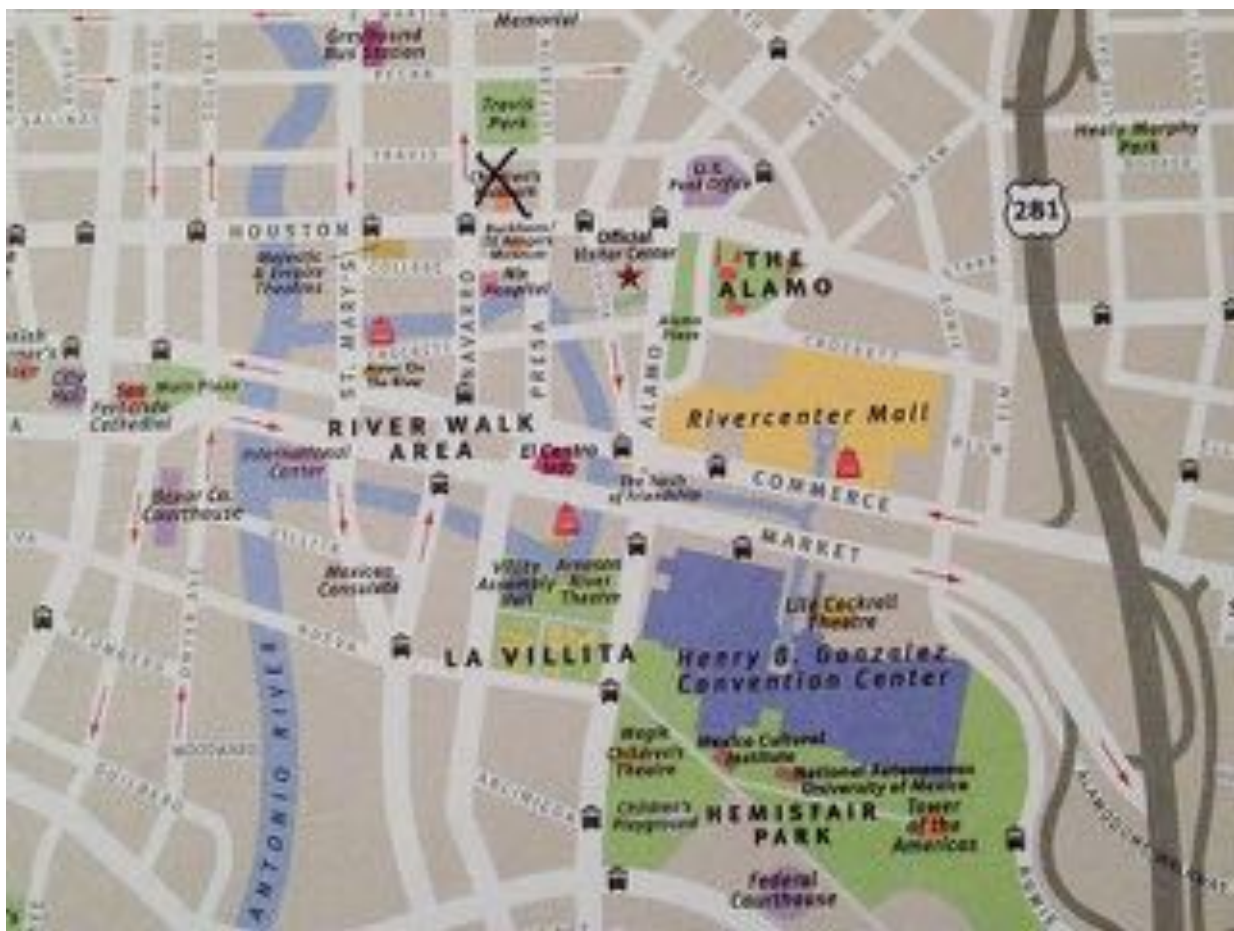
Prickly Pear Cactus grows everywhere here in the hill country. As we drove along, it was as common as thistle is up here in Wisconsin. So cool!



During this walk, Bryan and I spied a Scarlet Tanager. I don't think I'd ever seen one before, so that was a bit of high for me. I used some of my iTunes gift money to buy iBird for my phone so I can more quickly ID birds. Fun fun!

#### **Kicking back in San Antonio (2012-01-19 07:40)**

We arrived in San Antonio late in the day on Friday, December 30. Our hotel was a few blocks off the River Walk, and we set out to see the sights.







We hadn't anticipated how heavily crowded the River Walk would be. Apparently it's a pretty popular place to visit around New Years. In the restaurant district, we shuffled along through the thick crowd. The trees sure were lovely, all lit up and magical! After a few failed attempts at finding a restaurant, we left the River Walk and got ourselves dinner at Texas de Brazil. The drinks were good, and the salad bar (and the cheese bread!!!) was so good that I filled up before the meat course. We were entertained by a crazy aerial "wine angel" who flipped and spun and retrieved wine bottles for lucky patrons (see here for a video I found on YouTube).



On New Year's Eve morning, we had breakfast at a wonderful place called The Gunther House. So glad that Bryan's mom suggested it for us!





Our wait for a table was really pleasant as we sipped our coffee in the sunny courtyard and then browsed the restored home and the cute gift shop, full of Texas cookbooks and baking goods.



I seriously could not get enough of these trees. They are so beautiful it makes my heart ache.





After breakfast, we wound our way through the King William Historic District. So many pretty homes!



The Riverwalk extends through most of San Antonio, and it seems like it's become a wonderful way to connect the city and to help people get outdoors.



One of my main goals for our time in San Antonio was to eat at a restaurant where we'd have guacamole made at our table. We did this when we visited San Antonio back in 2001 (photos here!), and it made quite an impression. After a little walking, we stopped at Boudros for some drinks and guac with chips.





There's our waiter making me happy with avocados!



Oh, what a day!



We wandered down the Riverwalk until we came to a little park where we sat and read for a couple hours.





Ahh, a day spent walking and eating and reading. Pretty fun stuff! Now back to the hotel to change for New Year's Eve!



### **New Year's Eve on the Riverwalk (2012-01-20 07:45)**

On New Year's Eve, Bryan made us reservations for dinner at Acenar on the Riverwalk.





I was so excited when our server led us outside, through the crowds, and to a little secluded table on the balcony overlooking the Riverwalk. So cool!



Just look at those pretty lights!





It was a delicious meal, and a great way to celebrate the end of a terrific year.



After dinner, we wandered amidst the Riverwalk crowds until we came out at the Alamo.





Last time we visited during the day, so it was neat to see it at night. While you couldn't get inside, they had the facade all light up and glowing.





Exciting people that we are, we headed home early. At midnight, Bryan was asleep, but as I lay in bed reading, I heard the fireworks for quite some time. Sounded like fun...but maybe not as much fun as being cozy in bed.



On January 1, we headed home. We drove from San Antonio to College Station, stopping for lunch at this great restaurant in Bastrop.





I don't know if you heard last summer about some of the big fires in Texas. Bastrop contained an area known as the "Lost Pines," a beautiful pine forest. During last summer's drought, fire took out 34,000 acres and burned over 1,600 homes.

Bryan and I drove through Bastrop State Park, and we were awed at the extent and thoroughness of the fire damage. Really impressive, sobering destruction.





We drove the rest of the way to College Station, then flew to Dallas and finally to Madison, where the weather was in the teens. Burr! Bryan had off work on January second, so we sat around the house and enjoyed pretending like we were slugs. It was so nice to have a little down-time at home before Granny flew the kids up on the 4th. Thanks oodles to Granny and Grandad for giving us this lovely time together:)

## 8.2 February

Lorraine Davis, rest in peace (2012-02-21 12:55)



It feels like a subtle era has shifted in my life. How did the dinosaurs know when things had transitioned from the Palaeozoic to the Mesozoic era? Maybe it was some similarly quiet passing.

My maternal grandma, Lorraine Davis, passed away yesterday at the age of 93. She's was my last living grandparent (although Bryan's Grandma Jo is still with us and is doing well!). I've been thinking about it, and it feels really odd to not have my grandparents around. They've been such a constant my whole life. So many memories from my growing-up years included them. And now, one by one, they are all gone.

My grandma's husband, Grandpa Joe, passed away four years before I was born. Mum (which is what I called my grandma) missed him every day, as far as I could tell. The last thing she said was that she would get to see her husband soon. Mum had so valued being married, and she didn't like being a widow. I asked my mom about that once, and she said that sometimes bad things happen and people adapt and move on; but that sometimes bad things happen, and for that person, life isn't really ever OK in the same way again.

Mum had elegant, refined taste. She loved interior design, beautiful furniture, well-crated items. My mom grew up amidst fabric samples and paint swatches. Mum's interior design business, The Eloquent Touch, allowed her to share her lovely sense of style with others. Mum was proper and liked things just so. She grew up in the Milwaukee during the depression, and she spent much of her adult life looking toward a level of comfort that she keenly missed during her childhood. Butter had been hard to come by... margarine was more affordable, and as an adult she wouldn't consider using margarine. I think that was only in part because butter tastes so much better:)

Mum made her way in the world for decades after losing her husband. She was 54 when Grandpa Joe died, and she worked hard, with lots of courage, to support herself through the years. She tutored a wide array of students, sometimes working with prisoners at the local jail. I don't think it was easy, but she did it well.

I grew up an hour from Mum, and I spent a number of weekends visiting her as a child. These last days, memories of some of those visits have come trickling back.

- I loved Mum's dogs. Her black poodle, Mutzi, and her white poodle, Carrie were good playmates. When Mum would tell Mutzi that they were going to visit Margot (my mom), Mutzi would leap high into the air.

- Mum would come to Madison to visit us, and as a newly speaking toddler, I would look at her and say, "shopping?" Mum loved to shop. My mom loved to shop. My sister and I love to shop. It's hereditary. Shoes, coats, and handbags are particular obsessions. One day in high school, I noted that I thought I might have maxxed out my storage space for shoes. I said that I thought I'd work on my coat collection next. Mom laughed and asked if I'd ever noticed the closets of coats that Mum had. I imagine that in prehistoric times, grandmothers, daughters, and granddaughters would get together to pass along wisdom about the powers of medicinal herbs or the best way to fillet a mastodon. My grandmother and mother taught me how to find stellar purchases at Marshall Fields or TJ Maxx for 75 % off.
- Mum showed me how to polish her silver. She loved her silver flatware and desk set and took pride in taking good care of it.
- I learned about quality fabric from Mum and my mom. Natural fibers (especially wool) were esteemed. Good tailoring was inspected. The fit, the drape, the details were examined with a thoughtful touch. In later years when stokes and age had clouded her mind, she would come back into sharp focus as she remarked on my flower-embroidered winter jacket or the leatherwork on Sylvia's baby shoes.
- When I spent the night at Mum's, I would fall asleep in the deep dark (no night lights!). It was a bit unsettling. So was the sound of the whippoorwill singing into the night. In time, I came to love that song, and the stillness of her home in the woods.
- Mum's home was near a cold spring, and on several occasions, the two of us would walk down to the stream, roll up our pants, and wade into the icy water. We'd pull up watercress by the fist-full and take it back home to wash off the dirt and critters and make it into a very sharp-tasting salad. I liked the picking part much more than the eating part:)
- The paths near Mum's house were sprinkled with walnuts, chestnuts, and acorns. I remember her encouraging me to taste them, and the bitter taste still comes to mind when I smell fallen nuts.
- Sometimes Mum would take me out on a nighttime walk. I remember walking along the twisting roads in the woods near her home, petrified contemplating all the creatures lurking the the woods. I didn't want her to know I was afraid, so I decided to put all of my fear into one side of my body and to keep the hand that was holding her hand calm and relaxed. When she asked me what was wrong, I realized I'd gotten it backwards, and the hand that was gripping hers was tense with my unspoken fears.

Mum wasn't what I'd call an easy person. She had a strong will, a strong sense of what was right, and she in my experience, she didn't hesitate in sharing her convictions. Over the years, there were times when Mum and I clashed and there were times when we got along famously. Not an easy person. I think, though, that in some ways, I always sought her approval. I was just remembering an intense term in college when I had taken physics with calculus without the prerequisite courses (dumb, dumb, dumb). Having just failed another quiz, I called my mom from the phone in the computer lab. Choking back sobs, I asked her just not to tell Mum or my grandparents (like that would have been her first inclination!). I wanted them to be proud of me.

Mum was very conservative. Her Lutheran faith was one of her defining characteristics. Until her generation, there had been a Lutheran pastor in the family for many generations into the past. Things relating to church and to piety appealed to her soul.

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I miss my mom in some way every day. With the passing of my grandma, I feel like the earth has lost an important person who knew my mom. I also feel like the conveyor belt of time has notably moved forward. I'm now an

adult with kids of my own. Grandparents are moving on, and everyone I know is moving inexorably away from birth to death. It's odd to contemplate.

My mom worked extensively on our family genealogy. Here's my entry (somewhat dated...it's missing Sylvia!). Mom created our genealogy heading back in several branches to the 1400s. Thinking of our family as a tree, I feel like I watched my grandparents go through the autumn and winter of their lives. At the time, I was a new spring branch. Now I'm in my summer, and my own kids are growing their own spring branches. The seasons change, the eras shift. Time goes by.

For a slideshow of pictures of my grandma, visit this link. A gallery with the option to download images is here.

Finally, here's Mum's obituary. Rest in peace, my grandma.

Lorraine C. Davis, age 93, of Waukesha and formerly of Janesville and Beloit, died on Monday, Feb. 20, 2012, at Virginia Health & Rehabilitation Center, Waukesha, WI. She was born in Milwaukee on Jan. 24, 1919, the daughter of Henry and Tekla (Loeber) Bergmann. She graduated from South Division High School and UW Whitewater in 1940. She married Joseph L. Davis in Texas in September of 1942. He preceded her in death in 1973. Lorraine taught classes in High School, Vocational School, and tutored Math students throughout her life. She was also the sole proprietor of "The Eloquent Touch", an interior decorating service in Janesville. Lorraine is survived by 3 children: Peter (Marc) Davis of Port St. Lucie FL, Kate (Greg) Brand of Lynnwood WA, and Kirk (Susan) Davis of Plano TX; 7 grandchildren; 2 great grandchildren; and 3 siblings: John (Lois) Bergmann of Milwaukee, Edgar (Helmi) Bergmann of Germany and Carol (William) Lamm of Oconomowoc. She was preceded in death by her parents; husband; daughter, Margot (Kim) Babler; brother, Robert Bergmann; and sister, Mildred Klumb. A Funeral Service will be held at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 23, 2012, at OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, Beloit with Rev. Erik Jelinek officiating. A visitation will be held on Thursday from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. at the church. Interment will be in Eastlawn Cemetery, Beloit. In lieu of other expressions of sympathy please send memorials to the Heart Association or The Time of Grace Ministry. SCHNEIDER APFEL SCHNEIDER & SCHNEIDER FUNERAL HOME & CREMATORY is assisting the family.

## 8.3 July

### **Blogging hiatus (2012-07-17 21:57)**

Dotzourfamily.com has been live for seven years. My blog dashboard says I've written 1,241 posts and have received 2,143 comments (oh, how I have loved getting comments over the years). When Mom was sick, this blog was such an important tool for sharing news of her health journey. It was where we shared news of both babies being born, major family milestones, holidays, sickness and injury. This blog was one of my main tools for maintaining sanity after Sylvia was born and I was home full time. I am SO thankful that I could take the rough, long, or hard days and spin them into stories that would make people laugh. I used this blog as a platform for reflecting on life. It helped me live more intentionally as I relived moments by writing them down. Now I have a record of my early parenting years. It feels good to know it's there for posterity.

Sometime in 2010, I started blogging less about what I was thinking and more about what we were doing. Then in 2011, I found myself switching gears in my blog writing. I no longer felt the compulsive need to write. I wasn't composing posts in my head. I didn't have that itchy, "Must write blog post before going to bed" feeling that had been

my close companion over the previous years. In the second half of 2011, nearly all my blog posts were annotated photos. They were more a record of our days. I just wasn't feeling need.

So after finishing up our Christmas trip blog posts, I decided to take a break. I thought about posting an "I'm taking a break" note, but I wasn't sure that I would actually stick to it, so I just left things hanging. and in the following six months, I haven't even contemplated blogging. So I guess it was time for a break!

While I'm not posting at the moment, I am uploading new photos to my Flickr photostream on a very regular basis. I've maintained my compulsion to edit and upload family photos before the sun sets on the day. So if you want to see what the Dotzour family is up to, that's the place to look.



To see my photos, you've got a few options.

1. Bookmark <http://www.flickr.com/photos/adotzour/sets/> This is the home page for my photo albums.



2. Subscribe to the rss feed for <http://www.flickr.com/photos/adotzour/> This will have every photo I upload shoot into your rss reader.
3. Visit the photo page of DotzourFamily.com <http://dotzourfamily.com/pictures/> This just pulls all the photos from Flickr into my website.

And if you're interested in my photography work, you can see my site at <http://www.altheaphotos.com/>

For the time being, these are the best ways to see pictures of the kids and to see what's up in our lives. And until further notice, this blog is on hiatus. I imagine that at some point, I'll be back:)

Cheers!

Althea

### **Recent Dotzour family photos (2012-07-17 22:21)**

Here's a slideshow of the most recent photos on my photo stream. To see a full set of albums, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/adotzour/sets/>



BlogBook v1.0,

TeX 2 $\epsilon$  & GNU/Linux.

<https://www.blogbooker.com>

Edited: January 24, 2018

