7 Quick Takes Friday (Waiting for St. Nicholas, Christmas shopping, frog soap, and black bows)

— 1 —

Are you celebrating St. Nicholas Day? We always leave our shoes out the night before so the saint can fill them with treats. The boys were bouncing off the walls on St. Nicholas Eve with excitement. If they get this happy about the idea of some candy inside a shoe, I can't imagine what Christmas Eve will be like. I can't wait to find out.

Puppet by Leo

— 2 —

Last week Daniel and I bought a bar of soap shaped like a frog for his cousin "Elise" who loves Kermit and frogs.

The next night I turned on the bathroom faucet and glanced down to see that very bar of frog soap sitting on the soap dish. My gift-giving plans had been thwarted.

I went to find Daniel, who is almost 4.

Me: "Remember how we bought that frog soap?"

Daniel: "Yeah!"

Me: "We bought it for your cousin, right?"

Daniel: "Why did we buy it for her?"

Me: "Because she likes frogs."

Daniel: "But Mama, is that a *real* frog?"

You really can't win arguments with preschoolers.

— 3 —

I know some people get antsy about Christmas lights going up before Thanksgiving or too early in Advent or whatever else. I just love Christmas lights. I wish they were up year-round—or at least through the darkest days of the winter. Every year the boys and I enjoy looking for lights on our commute. And even though we're not driving as far as we used to, thanks to our move this year, they are a highlight of our drive home.

So if you have Christmas lights up, thank you. We appreciate your generosity and

creativity every single time we pass your house. And, if I may make one small request, now that you've done all that work, don't feel you need to rush to take them down right after Christmas.

— 4 —

We don't do the Elf on the Shelf in our house, not because we have any ideological issues with it, but because I think Elf maintenance is a lot of trouble. But a friend shared this idea of the Kindness Elves, and I love it. Maybe, just maybe, I could be persuaded to try this with my children. The only problem is I don't want to add anything else to Advent. But why can't we do it in January? Or February? I think I'll look for some discount elves after Christmas.

— 5 —

I had two New Year's resolutions for 2013. One was to take off one day from work each month. I've failed miserably with that one. So let's talk about my second one: creating the book telling the story of Daniel's life before he met us. I managed to get his big brother's book completed before we celebrated his first "Gotcha Day," the anniversary of the day we met him.

Daniel has been our son since August 2011, and I finally finished his book a few weeks ago. It arrived, and he was so happy. We read it over and over and over, and he didn't have many questions.

His one source of confusion? He can't understand what a hotel is. Except for our adoption trips, we've never stayed in a hotel with him or his brother, and I am doing a terrible job explaining to him that there are places people can stay while they're traveling.

The questions will get harder as the years go by, and here he's already stumped me with this one.

— 6 —

The other day Leo asked me to buy him some bows. He was thrilled until he looked through the bag.

"Mama, why didn't you buy any black ones?" he asked. Black is, after all, his favorite color.

"They don't sell black ones," I said. "Most people think black is a sad color."

But I was wrong. Two days later I was walking through a store and saw a package of wrapping paper—including leopard print and zebra striped—and matching black and red bows. I had to buy it. So I was wrong about the black bows, but now I have some fabulous wrapping paper.

Now I just need to find some presents to wrap inside it.

— 7 —

Leo's school had a Jingle Bell Shop, where the students could buy gifts for family members. Leo wanted to buy for his parents, brother, grandparents, and all the aunts and uncles he'll see over Christmas. It was not a short list.

I gave him what I felt was an extravagant $30 and told him he could keep whatever he didn't spend.

I knew he'd come home with cash—and he did: $10.

But what was adorable was his bag full of gifts, each carefully selected and so personal. I can't tell you what he picked because there's a good chance that Grandma or Uncle Ricky will be reading this blog. But I was struck by the care he took in selecting gifts. And there must have been some fantastic parent volunteers to help him choose 50-cent items.

He ran into the house and grabbed the wrapping paper to wrap my present before I could see it. And he did a nice job.

So here's my new plan for holiday shopping. Next year I let Leo handle all the shopping at the Jingle Bell Shop. When he gets home, he can do all the wrapping. And everyone will get a black bow.

Read more quick takes at Jen's Conversion Diary.