

What we learned about ice packs, heating issues, the letter X, and the best day ever (7 quick takes Friday)

— 1 —

Last weekend we celebrated St. Patrick's Day early with more family than we usually see for Christmas. When I told Leo I had volunteered to make dessert, he proposed a master vision: a shamrock-shaped cake, preferably green, with St. Patrick standing in the center and the snakes diving into the ocean to his right.

We went for cupcakes instead, and the shamrock shape eluded us. I have no idea how those grocery store bakeries have cupcakes in the shape of dancing leprechauns when I can't even place mine in a simple shamrock. But it didn't matter.

We had St. Patrick, a shamrock, and snakes.



And we had yummy cupcakes. Soon I will have to share the orange cake recipe I used. It is so simple, healthy, and moist. Some of my family members gave me gentle grief for making orange cake for St. Patrick's Day. But that didn't stand in anyone's way when it was time to eat dessert.

— 2 —

John smelled natural gas in the house on St. Patrick's Day morning, so we kicked off our celebration with a call to the emergency gas leak line. When the worker arrived, he told us it was actually a fairly high level of gas, and suddenly the boys and I were headed out the door to my parents' house.

Because our boys were so sad to have to leave their home when they had just scored yet another snow day, I took them to a mall. We watched a man use a key to turn on the escalator, threw penny after penny into the fountain, played in the toy store, and saw the shopkeepers open the stores.



As we were pulling up to my parents' house, and I was feeling a little frustrated that we were losing a day to yet another snowfall and yet another a gas leak, Leo said, "This is the best day ever!"

That same day, as we were sitting down to our corned beef and cabbage, John realized that our furnace had stopped working. It didn't seem possible that we would need to pay yet another repairman to come to our house, but there we were, scrambling to find someone to come in and service the furnace—the one that had just been turned back on earlier that day after the gas pipes were fixed.

Thinking that doesn't sound like the best day ever?

That's because I'm telling the story the wrong way. The most exciting thing ever happened! Our bedroom has its own electric heat, so the boys camped out on the floor of our room that night.

A child eating an ice cream cone in front of Cinderella's castle at Disney World can't be as happy as our boys were to sleep on Mama and Baba's floor. We toasted invisible marshmallows and read books together by a campfire made of socks.

"Mama," Leo said, "I hope the heat never comes back on!"

Well, I wouldn't go that far. But we have decided it might have to become the special treat of all treats in this household.

— 3 —

Fast forward two days. When I went to pick Leo up from his aftercare program at school, the teacher told me he had bumped his head, and she had given him an ice pack.

As I leaned down to look at the mark behind his ear, Leo said, "Mama, what's inside an ice pack? Is it water?"

"Um...I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

A little bit had leaked out, and my son had tasted some. Ack. Right on the ice pack, there were really scary words about calling your local poison control center.

Now we have absolutely talked to our children about what they can and can't eat and drink.

They can even sing the Mr. Yuk theme song. Daniel doesn't like to walk down the laundry detergent aisle at the store because "Dere are chemicals, Mama!"

But I never ever thought to warn about an ice pack. So here I was on the phone with a kind lady at the poison control center.

Leo and I both learned something that day. He learned never to eat ice pack fluid. I learned that I will never hand a child an ice pack without clear instructions.

Of course, when I asked a doctor friend about it, he assured me that ice packs aren't really toxic. Some snack cakes have more toxins than ice packs, he tells me. That's comforting...right?

— 4 —

John and I rarely go out on weeknights-or weekend nights, for that matter. But when we found out that the Archdiocese of Baltimore was holding The Francis Factor at Loyola University Maryland, where I work, we decided to go together. My father kindly offered to spend the evening with our boys, and off we went.

My office had invested in a cardboard cutout Pope Francis, so we brought it to the event and people stopped to have their picture taken with it.

Leo and Daniel have both met the cardboard cutout pope, but with less enthusiasm than the crowds showed that night.

Leo's response? "Mama, that's not the real pope."

Daniel's response when he saw the pope standing in our living room? "Why is he here?" Then he hid behind a chair.



Daniel finally decided he wanted just to touch him, but not do anything more. If the real pope were here, though, he'd be the first to climb onto the papal seat on the stage.



— 5 —

Spring has arrived! Apparently we may still see more snow, but even on the chilly mornings you can hear the birds singing and smell the first scents of the season. It's getting close. By the time Easter comes we should really be enjoying spring.

And one day we'll see trees like this one again!



— 6 —

For the first time in my life I'm being honored for working somewhere for five years. If that doesn't sound long to you, then you're not my father or one of my former colleagues. I have never worked anywhere for more than three years. Yet here I am.

At a time when many people are not employed, I feel particularly fortunate, and even more so when I realize that I get to do work that I enjoy, and for a great purpose.

— 7 —

Almost every week Leo has to find three pictures in magazines for the letter they are learning in kindergarten. This week we had to find pictures for J and X.

Even though we were permitted to do words including X, it seemed a bit hopeless to me. Then at the last minute, just when all hope seemed to be gone, we found our photos. I don't know what it feels like to win the Mega Million. But I know how it feels to turn the page in a magazine and see fox slippers staring back at you.



It's then you know—even after destroying your crockpot dinner by cooking it (or not cooking it) on the wrong setting, even after a trip to the pediatrician, and even after you hear it might snow again next week—that it is truly the best day ever.

I hope today is the best day ever for you, too.

Read more quick takes at Jen's Conversion Diary.