



It all started simple enough, if you excuse the fact that I was in a grocery store on New Year's Eve. It wouldn't have happened if we could mandate that holidays like New Year's Eve could always fall on a weekend, but no, they creep up on us on Mondays or Tuesdays even Wednesdays from time to time and catch you completely unawares.

That was me. I was caught unawares. It's embarrassing to admit, really it is. I generally feel I'm a well organized person. One who is on the ball; prepared at all times. Clearly I'm not. New Year's Eve was upon us and I didn't have a single piece of junk food in the house for the family to munch on. There'd be outrage! In fact, I knew there'd be total mutiny if I didn't brave the tide of other unprepared people and stock up. So, I did.

There I was minding my own business while I picked out some fruit, because after all if I choose a fruit platter to go with the chocolate and caramel dip I can consider it healthy right? Anyway, there I was minding my own business when my friend Henrietta bumped into me. Rather roughly too. She was vying for position around the grapes and had jostled me instead of her intended victim.

Henrietta is a well meaning and overly boisterous friend. Her greeting was nothing shy of astronomical proportions, and honestly did a far better job of clearing her path to the intended fruits than the cart jostling could have ever done. In minutes people scattered for fear her loud voice was intended for them rather than a friendly greeting. I smiled knowingly and turned to greet her.

That was my second mistake of the day, the first being that I'd found my pantry barren of all junk that one feels the dire need to indulge in on New Year's Eve. If I had just run like all the other shoppers I would have escaped the doom that was fast approaching. You may not believe that the suggestion Henrietta is about to make to me was anything short of fantastic, but mark my words it was nothing but trouble!

Henrietta jostled me again as she maneuvered her cart closer and beckoned to another friend who was desperately hoping the deli counter was about to call her number. Poor Penny had the look of a trapped cat on her face. Terror etched into every corner as she stood clutching her basket and frantically waving her ticket in the air.

It took Penny five minutes to make her way to the counter, still madly waving her ticket, and make her selections. Personally, I think she was really pushing it, asking for more than two items, and the employee behind the counter shared my sentiments as he glowered down at her when she requested 4 ounces of sun dried tomatoes to go with her mozzarella and porchetta. By the time she made it over to where Henrietta was loudly squealing, "Penny, over here. Can you see us, Penny? Here we are, just follow the sound of my voice!" I was desperate to make my escape.

As if anyone could hear anything besides Henrietta's voice! It is still a mystery as to how a woman so petite can bellow so loudly, but it's one I'd rather not get to the bottom of thank you very much! I stood there, waiting like an obedient child wishing more than anything I was selecting a package of fresh and squishy marshmallows or sour gummies. Honestly, I would have even taken the task of picking out blue cheese to go with some obscure vegetable salad if it would have meant that I wasn't standing inches from Hen while she shouted.

But as I said, I'd already made the second mistake of the day by turning around when she

jostled me and then agreeing to stand and chat with her while we waited on Penny. Waited on Penny for what, I had no idea, but Henrietta was bursting with something to tell us. I figured her sister Nell had the baby or maybe Henrietta was having some unexpected company for the holidays, but when the word resolutions came up I stared at her like a deer trapped in headlights.

I don't *do* resolutions, much less New Year's Resolutions. If only I had settled for a junk food free evening... I used to make resolutions, like the rest of the world. I would come up with insanely crazy things I wanted to do like eat more vegetables, lose weight, or even exercise more. When I fell on my face with those resolutions I came up with easier ones like going on dates with the hubs more, or frequenting parks more often with my kids. I even attempted a few fun ones like eat more chocolate, but they all died slow and painfully agonizing deaths while I sat staring at my lists feeling every pang of guilt over my inability to conquer them.

What kind of woman fails at eating more chocolate? Oh I know you're thinking it, but when you're the mother of four children there's only so many times a day you can sneak away to hide in the pantry to scoff up another square, nibble a handful of chocolate chips, or suck on a delightful truffle before the kids are banging at the door accusing you of not sharing! Don't even bother to deny it, they'll see the chocolate on your lips, smell it on your breath, and taste it on your fingers. I'm telling you, it's a doomed and hopeless resolution, which my hips and derriere are just that much more thankful for.

I'd tried to break the cycle, but it was a worthless cause. I finally resolved not to have any more resolutions, and once I got over the guilt of it things were just peachy. I didn't have to feel guilty for my lack of exercise, for indulging in desert, for taking the car instead of the bike, or any one of a million other things countless people worldwide were busy feeling pangs of guilt and remorse about. I was, in essence, free. It was blissful.

So how on earth was I getting lulled into a conversation about resolutions? I thought wildly for some excuse to scurry off, to make a mad dash for those lovely squishy marshmallows but in my moment of panic I was pulling up empty. Void. Nothing. I had to stand there in the middle of the produce section of my local grocery store and listen to the dreaded idea of resolutions.

“So, what do you think Jo, you up for it?”

I stared blankly hoping they’d forgotten me, “Uh, what? Sorry, I didn’t catch that.”

“All this blasted noise, not a wonder,” Henrietta moaned. “Are you with us or not Jo? Will you start a blog this year and vow to keep it up? We’ll be in it together, all of us. Even if no one else reads them, we can. Think of us as virtual pen-pals.”

I groaned inwardly. Penpals, another abysmal failure in my life. I always wrote back, but somehow forgot to post the letters, and when I did post them my pen friend had long since given up on hearing from me. “So, you want all three of us to start a blog?” I feigned ignorance.

Henrietta laughed one of those condescending laughs that rang with the mixture of irritation and contempt, “Yes silly! We all vow to start a blog. Tonight! We’ll not only be well on our way, but have one step up on the rest of the world in regards to resolutions.”

“I dunno, Henrietta. You know I don’t do resolutions, they tend to be like rules, you know, only there to break.”

“Jo!” Penny gasped. A rule follower if there ever was one. She colored inside the lines, respected the 12 items or less signs at the express lane, and never dared to hand over an expired coupon. She also refused to refreeze meat, use anything past its expiration date, or to drink water unless it was filtered.

I smiled, “Oh Penny, come on. You know I’m not a general rule breaker.” I quickly tried to hide my shopping list before she found out that my menu for the night was take out pizza, chocolate covered raisins, squishy marshmallows, ice cream, and chips. Oh, and of course the fruit tray. She’d faint on the spot.

“Girls, focus,” Henrietta bellowed in her indoor voice, the one loud enough to unhinge a steel door. “Are you with me or not?”

“Let me get this straight,” I said, “we just have to start a blog tonight. That’s it. That’s the resolution.”

“Yes!” Henrietta squealed.

“I don’t ever have to blog on it again?” I asked, tempting fate.

“Oh Jo, come on, what would be the point of starting a blog and not using it? Of course we’re going to post on it more often! That’s the whole point. We’re resolving to start blogs this year so we can *use* them!”

I sighed, I’d get home quicker if I agreed. I knew that, but part of me wanted to rebel. All of me wanted one of those blasted squishy marshmallows I’d been dreaming of since I’d left the house. Blog. I pondered it for a minute. How hard could it be?

I’d often travel the world over before breakfast and repeated my trip before falling asleep at night. I had virtual friends who didn’t even know me. I’d been inside houses of complete strangers thanks to the photos they posted. I could do this, it’s just a blog after all, what’s the worst that could happen?

Oh I shouldn’t have tempted fate. I shouldn’t have. I know you’re sitting there on your comfy couch or chair. Maybe you have a cup of cocoa or a bottle of water with you and you’re thinking Hen is right and blogging would be a fantastic resolution. If only we all could know exactly what the worst was that could happen.. But we can’t, can we, so I did the unthinkable.

“Okay Hen, I’ll do it! But right now I have to make a mad dash to finish getting a few things for tonight. If I don’t hurry, poor Bob will be going insane.”

“Tonight!” Henrietta shouted at me, as I started to roll my cart forward.

I nodded, “Tonight, I’ll start it tonight then. See you Henretta, Penny!” and I ran while I could. I ran straight for the candy aisle and snatched up three bags of squishy marshmallows. I

know they were squishy because I tested their squishiness before I plopped them in my cart. I don't care if most people find that disgusting or revolting or any other "ing". If I'm going to indulge in a marshmallow for dinner it darn well better be the freshest squishiest marshmallow around!

I loaded up on chocolate covered raisins and gummy worms while I was at it and then made a mad dash for the other items on my list. I snagged the newest Disney flick displayed by the registers for the evening and made my way through the checkout, using the express lane I might add. And yes, I had 14 items in my cart. I made sure Penny wasn't in the same aisle as I was!

By the time I got home I had no time to think about, much less discuss, blogs. I had a 2 year old running nude around the house and a husband so frazzled his hair was standing on end. Once that problem was done and dusted I had lunch to fix, a few pizzas to order, and a house I really needed to pretend to clean.

Nothing says killjoy quite like stepping on a stray lego or banana. I'm telling you, I've really got to notify the correct authorities and get these holidays changed from weekdays to weekends. It's just not right! Not only was my home junk food free, but it was trashed— big time!

That evening, we were finally settling in for pizza and our first movie of the night. I was determined to put Peter, the formerly nude two year old, and Anna, our four year old to bed early. This took a little bit of finesse on my part because they already knew something special was happening. However, I'm not the Mamma for nothing around here. I had a plan so cunning stuffed up my sleeve, I nearly forgot about it!

We rolled clocks backwards during ice cream treats and movies with the younger two. If my plans had been superior and not just cunning I would have managed to not let the older two in on the idea, and I could have tucked all four children into bed at an early midnight, known to the rest of the world as 9pm. But alas, I foiled that when I managed to employ the other two to be sure all clocks were turned back.

That's the problem with homeschooling, when you try to teach the eight year old how to tell time, inadvertently your younger children are bound to learn it too. Ordinarily this might not be an issue, but eventually they start cracking wise and saying things like, "But Mamma, you said only five more minutes a half hour ago!" And, if a four year old can be that cunning, I had to bring out the big girl panties and be sure I had all my bases covered.

Honestly, I'm all for going to bed at a normal time on New Year's Eve. I see no point in waiting up with the rest of the world so we can all scream in joyous unity, "Happy New Year!" All while dogs are howling, sirens are wailing, and the nature hiding in the shrub is screaming in terror. Truth is, I'm all for a normal night, curled up under my comfy blankets and awakened at midnight by the fireworks. I can sleepily roll over and declare "Happy New Year" to no one in particular, because my very handsome husband is generally snoring, and wakes up refreshed and ready to greet my early risers. And let's be honest, we mothers rarely get enough sleep because no matter how late you keep your early riser up, they are still going to get up at the crack of dawn.

I've tried to combat it by sticking a baby gate in the bedroom doorway, but our Peter is one of those crazy smart two year olds, and figured out how to climb over it. I found him happily munching his way through a box of Cheerios and sitting in a half-gallon of milk. My extra ten minutes of sleep was definitely *not* worth the mess awaiting me! And the only thing worse than the mess was my husband's morning greeting of, "You might want to give him a bowl next time." You'd think it were customary for our children to eat like that, the way the remark just rolled off his tongue.

So you'll understand why my hideous idea to escape the boisterous Henretta in search of my ever squishy marshmallows wasn't thought of again until half past nine that night. Before that, I was busy counting down the new year, screaming it out to the entire, albeit confused, neighborhood, lighting sparklers {and making sure no one got burned} and drinking sparkling apple juice, because even if I'd rather sleep the holiday away I have children who adore celebrations.

When I settled on the couch at nine thirty that evening clutching the infamous bag of squishy marshmallows my feet bumped a stray Macbook laying on the coffee table, and I sighed

remembering how I'd promised to get my blog up and running. My back to back viewings of not just one film where a museum comes to life, but two, were going to be mixed with figuring out this blogging stuff.

I sighed and popped a marshmallow in my mouth while searching online for a free blogging site. I was amazed to see the various places I had to choose from, and went with the most common choice. I chewed thoughtfully on another marshmallow while debating a name for my blog. I was on my third marshmallow when an evil grin flashed across my face and I knew exactly what I was going to call my blog: *Squishy Marshmallows*. I must have snickered under my breath as well because Bob raised an eyebrow at me which was a clear sign he wanted to know what I was up to. Winking back would not be wise, he'd presume it was all bad. I smiled and he returned to his bowl of popcorn.

It didn't take me long to locate a Marshmallow template for my blog, and that's when I hit the third major snafu of the day. I had a blog, but what on earth was I going to put on it? Somehow I knew if Henretta found out I'd written "I love squishy marshmallows!" a thousand times, like a punished child made to write lines she'd never forgive me. Then again, that might not be a bad idea.... No, I agreed. Fair is fair. I had to come up with something.

I visited a few of the blogs I often frequent. Lovely pictures. Quaint families. Lessons learned. That's the moment that it hit me! Not the Macbook, stay calm. No, the idea that I could actually take my three second sentence to escape Henretta's loud voice in the local grocery and turn it into something of use. I *could* blog.

I could be real, and prove that not everyone who blogs is afraid to be real. Okay, so I'm not totally impressed that there are days I don't shower before 3pm. Or that my 2 year old has been known to rip everything off the toy room shelf before I've even uttered the words, "Peter where are you?" And yes, there have been days when the first dish washed is after all four of my kids are snug in bed, but hey I can't be the only one it happens to, right? So why should I be ashamed to admit it?

In fact, I reasoned at that moment, that there were probably thousands of women out there that it happened to all the time, and I could be the first one to finally admit it. My blog

wouldn't be about the perfect shiny always in order craze. No, it was going to be the squishy, and often sticky bits. As I pondered my revelation I savagely bit into my fourth marshmallow. I debated hunting down a candle to roast a few over, but decided that if I was on a roll I'd better cash in on it because the first movie was nearly over.

An hour later I'd managed to upload some photos of my family to the side bar, slap up some books we were currently reading, and even find a few well loved links we visit often. I even had a header, a title, and a small bio. I was feeling pretty smug, and oh so tempted to email Henretta and tell her so when my inbox informed me I had a message. I took two more marshmallows before clicking on my inbox. We both know, don't we, that the message will be from Henretta, and I wasn't sure I was up for her gloating. I poked a few chocolate covered raisins inside the second marshmallow before devouring it in one glutenous bite.

I inhaled deeply enough for Bob to stare at me from across the room and clicked on my inbox.

Dear Jo,

*Don't forget you promised to make headway on your New Year's Resolution **tonight!** Don't back out on us, Penny and I are counting on you.*

Henretta

I rolled my eyes and heard eight year old Sarah mutter, "If she keeps doing that her eyes will stay like that!" Her brother affirmed the comment with a giggle he wouldn't want his friends to hear, and I'm pretty certain the snorting, sneeze-like sound coming from Bob's direction had nothing to do with the current scene in the movie, no matter how amusing it was!

"That's right, pick on me, I don't care. Doesn't bother me a bit, but I'm not gonna share my marshmallows either!"

The kids ignored me, not surprising considering they were sitting on the floor pigging out on gummy worms and cold pizza. Bob pretended indifference, but I was smarter than that. I

knew if I didn't guard my mallows with my life he'd sneak up behind me and run off with the whole bagful. There's no denying his infatuation with marshmallows is almost as deep as mine.

I slid the bag a little closer to me while contemplating exactly what sad truth I'd manage for my first blog post. The thought occurred to me that I could easily, and probably should, admit why I started the blog. After all, if only Penny and Henretta are reading it, what difference will it make? I can be honest and open about Henretta's bullying ways without being entirely rude, right?

I sat, staring off into space while mindlessly munching a marshmallow. If I don't admit why I started the blog then would it be fair to assume I'm starting the blog off on the wrong foot? Ha, now that sounded like a great question for an upcoming book club meeting. I took a deep breathe, inhaled three more mallows and then started typing:

Welcome to my blog. That seems like such a typical and lame start to a blog. Isn't that what everyone says? I dunno, it sounds rather formal to me, and if you could see my house right now, at this very minute, you'd know I wasn't a formal person at all! In fact, if you searched my cupboards you wouldn't find a lick of china in there. It's true. Regardless, one really must have an opening mustn't they?

So, I guess that's mine. I'm not exactly sure what I'll do with this blog to be honest. I have to admit, to anyone brave enough to read this crazy thing, that I've never really considered creating a blog before. With homeschooling three kids and keeping a two year old in clothes {what's with the nude stage!?!} not to mention dinner on the table life is already full enough.

However, my friend Henretta cornered me and another friend, Penny, in the grocery store and suggested that all three of us start a blog for New Year's. Her idea was that we use them as our resolutions. Now, I'm not a person who likes resolutions. In fact, I generally run fast and far from them. Okay, let's be honest, I hate resolutions. I do. I can't even remember the last time I made one!!

But Henretta has this way about her, and she persuaded me to join her in this new endeavor.

So, you'll forgive me, right, if I don't keep up with daily blogging? You'll ignore the lack of beautiful craft projects, perfectly polished rooms, and daily blog updates, right?

I could make a quick introduction to you, but then I suspect the only people reading this, really, are the friends in on this insane idea! All the same, I'm Jo, or at least that's what they call me most of the time. My parents much prefer the name Josie, and honestly I'm partial to both versions. They are both me, and I feel pretty comfortable with both names to be honest.

I love marshmallows, but you probably already guessed that just by looking around right? I might love them too much, to be honest, but I'm in good company because my handsome and amazing husband loves them too. There's nothing quite like a golden roasted marshmallow hot off the campfire {or a candle if you're desperate} with its yummy crunchy outside and soft sticky inside. I figured that's a whole lot of what this blog is going to be about. A whole lot of sticky insides about what our life is all about.

It's not that I'm into the whole world knowing what my family is up to at any moment. That's not even a reason I'd consider blogging. The truth is, a year from now when I look back over this blog I want to laugh when I remember that my 2 year old colored on the walls again, peed in the sandbox, or screamed loudly when I told him he could not ride in the trash truck. I want to look back on those crazy moments in my life when I thought for sure I'd yank my hair out, and say, "That was funny, and someday when you have kids..."

*I want to remember that my eight year old struggled with reading, or my ten year old hated the mere thought of writing. Now those might seem like strange things to **want** to remember, but let's face it all those struggles make our victories so much sweeter. When my kids call me one day and say, "Little Janie {and kids if you're reading this I don't expect you to name your children Janie!} can't read to save her life and I'm in tears because I think I've failed her and I don't know what to do..." I want to sympathize with them because I do get it.*

When I sit around the Christmas table with grandchildren curled up in my lap I want to be the kind of grandmother who can weave a tale about her children so well that everyone wants to hear it. That my child isn't totally embarrassed because they can look back on that time with fond memories too. Whoa, I'm getting a little too sappy there, even for me!

I quickly saved and posted my blog post before I had second thoughts. I closed my Macbook with a flourish and reached for my marshmallows only to find Bob's hand where my mallows were supposed to be. I jumped a mile before snatching the bag up and scolding him.

"Robert Garret, what do you think you're doing with **my** marshmallows!"

There were snickers from the kids, "Dad you should know better than trying to snatch Mom's marshmallows, she's totally addicted!"

"Thanks a million Eli!" I jokingly sneered before throwing a mallow at him.

He made a fist and pumped the air with it, celebrating his victory in scoring one of the well sought after goodies.

"Unfair!" Bob protested.

"Baby!" Kelly teased.

Bob pretended to sulk, and I passed him the bag of ooey goodness. After all, I wasn't joking about my hips and derriere being grateful for the lack of junk food in our home! If I wasn't going to make resolutions to work off all those mallows, I'd better watch out on how many I ate!

After ringing in the New Year a second time, to a far less confused neighborhood, and tucking children into bed I found myself dodging around the lounge as I scraped up bits of candy and trash. I might not make resolutions, but I wasn't about to start the New year with a house full of ants or mice either!

"Leave it Jo, let's go to bed," Bob yawned. He'd taken the early shift with Peter and Anna this morning and I'd actually gotten the rare luxury of sleeping in.

"I'm not tired," I lied between yawns.

He removed the trash from my hands scooped me up and carried me off to bed



Author's Note:

While looking through some old writing files, I stumbled upon this old NaNo project from 2010. As you can guess, blogging was its height, or at least incredibly popular at that time. Instead of answering questions on forums or through email, everyone wanted to direct you to some blog or other with some new ragingly glorious idea. Some were, in truth, quite helpful, but like many forms of interaction, it also awoke the great need for “comparison” amongst people.

I had this idea, that I thought was pretty good to be honest, to create a small series of books about homeschooling Mom's. This was to be the first in the series. Henrietta, if you hadn't guessed, was supposed to be the picture perfect blogger, who really didn't like it when things didn't go according to plan. Josie was content to fly by the seat of her pants, which I felt rather heroic of her since I cannot stand flying by the seat of my pants. And then there was quite Penny, who marched to the beat of her own drum, but was going to get a little too caught up in a few of her own problems.

To be extremely clear, the idea was not to mock homeschooling. I was homeschooled, I homeschooled my children. In fact, for many years my children presumed that all people were homeschooled. Mind you, they also went through a phase where they were convinced that all people who went to school were bullies, and no matter how I tried to point out the flaw in their reasoning they wouldn't let the idea go.

And, it did not help the day we were using the swings at our local elementary school and a little boy threw a younger girl off the swing so he could have a turn. My youngest turned, glared at me and said, “I TOLD you so!” As it turned out, the fighting children were siblings, which was obvious when the little girl picked herself up and screamed, “I'm telling Mummy!”

No, rather the entire idea was to open up a series of books that fellow homeschoolers could relate to, laugh with {or at}, and who knows, maybe even learn something from. Where we could laugh ourselves silly over the angst we feel about choosing the right books, the right curriculum, or even the fights that have been known to take place over which methodology is best.

I have always remembered the “squishy marshmallow” scene in this story. I think there are two very good reasons for that. The first one is that I too adore marshmallows, although I rarely indulge in them. And the thing is, I’m quite picky about my mallows too. I’ve even been known to go down the baking aisle at my local Wal-Mart and inhale as I walk past the mallows, much to the humor, or confusion, of the family member with me.

The second reason is that I laughed myself silly writing that scene. Was it really that funny? Probably not, you’ll have to decide that for yourself. But, I figured if it made me laugh while writing it, or even snicker a little, surely others would get some form of delight out of it, right?

The story was never completed, I wanted it to be humorous, and attempted to fashion it, in a way, off a series of mysteries I was reading at the time. The author did a wonderful job weaving humor into even the most serious of situations. It was something I aspired to do, make people laugh through the story I was writing. Yet, I found it difficult to stay in “funny” mode at all times when writing, and then life took over and that was that..

In fairness, it’s unlikely the story will ever be completed. And that’s not to say that people might still enjoy such a book series, but rather that the passion to write that particular story is long gone. Sometimes, I can open old notebooks, journals, and files and be drawn right back into the thick of things. Have the deep desire to pick up where I left off. And other times I find myself laughing hysterically at what I wrote, groaning inwardly, and wondering if I should simply destroy the content.

This story made me laugh, I remembered the hows and whys of the idea, but the desire to complete it is utterly gone. If you found it funny, though, you may be delighted to know there are other portions of it written, and I may, or may not, share them here. You know, once I’ve

finished reading through them and decided if they should just be thrown in the fire pit, where I could roast a marshmallow if I had any.

The Reluctant Author 