

The Handheld Addiction

From the dawn of the console video game system- well, from the Atari VCS/2600 anyway, close enough to the beginning in any event- I have been an avid partaker of home video games. Starting with the Atari, then moving onto Colecovision, NES, Sega Master System & Genesis, then slowing down a little, eventually getting a Playstation, 3DO, and a Gamecube. Absent from all this was any sort of handheld system. Well, if you don't count the single-game LCD games from the early 80s- I did have a handheld Donkey Kong. But as far as interchangeable handhelds, this era just passed me by. From the Gameboy and its successors to the Atari Lynx, Sega Gamegear and Nomad (official portable Genesis) I have known of their existence and even played other people's systems, but as far as owning one...?

A few months ago that changed when I picked up one of these little guys:



Actually, it's bigger than the picture looks- it's the Nintendo DSi XL Super Mario Bros 25th anniversary edition. While others have gaming tastes that lean toward strategy games, shooters, and online games, I have gravitated more toward the Nintendo-esque platformers and adventure games. That is, Super Mario Bros and Legend of Zelda. Currently my library consists of just eight games, but I have access to more through my library. In fact, that got me interested in a puzzle series, "Professor Layton." That is one of my games that I have yet to fire up aside from testing. Besides that game I have three Mario games (Mario & Luigi II, Super Mario 64- an enhanced version of the old N64 title, and Mario Kart DS which came with the system), Zelda Spirit Tracks, a couple Sega titles (Sonic Rush and Phantasy Star 0), and a Konami game collection. I eventually plan on getting the other Zelda title, the New Super Mario Bros, and the two Atari Greatest

Hits collections.

So far, only two have had a lot of play time- two of the Mario games. I have been playing the Mario 64 title most recently. This game consists of the original 15 courses and the secret stars, and adds a bunch more. I believe there are 30 more stars to obtain than the original. Despite being called **Mario 64**, you actually get to play as four different characters, another of many changes from the N64 days. In fact, when you start you can't even play as Mario- you start as Yoshi and have to rescue Mario, Luigi, and Wario before you can play as them, though on many courses you can pick up a hat to play as a particular character until you get hit and lose the hat. In the original, Mario got special abilities from blocks such as flying Mario, transparent Mario, and metal Mario (I'm sure I am not remembering the names correctly). In this game, each character gets one of these abilities from the block, and it adds breathing fire for Yoshi.

To make things more interesting, there are things placed in courses that only one character can access. There are things in ice blocks only Yoshi can melt with his fire ability, giant black blocks only Wario can smash, and of course the various things requiring the special abilities. So far, I have completed over half the courses, and a few stars each from a couple more. I have also collected several castle stars, some of which are not in the original game. And remember the rabbits Mario had to catch? Well, they increased that- a lot. Now you catch rabbits for keys to play mini-games (I haven't played any yet, but my guess is they are like the Mario Party mini-games) and there are different color rabbits depending on who you are playing as. There are also eight glowing white rabbits- if you catch all of them, you can open a special door to get who-knows-what. So far I have only seen and caught four or five of the eight. I think I have some 110 or so stars, well over enough to do the final battle with Bowser (80 required) though I haven't yet.

Controls are a little different from the original as the DS doesn't have an analog control like the N64 did. Instead, they go back to the classic style with a walking speed, but then you can go faster by holding a button while walking. There are a couple other styles by mimicking analog via the touch screen, which shows a map throughout the game, but it just doesn't work for me. The new 3DS adds an analog control, but it will be a few years before I get one of those. Anyway, here's a video you can watch. It's the first part of a walkthrough of the entire game:

Big Little Things I NEED To Get Back Into

I dunno... I just pray that I get to feeling more like your friendly neighborhood Jamiahsh soon. I know it is going to take time and I am an optimist but really I do miss the things I was able to do before all this began (putting my voice lessons on hold, missing theatre board meetings, Oscar party... but I did get to participate over the web, little things that may seem trivial that mean so much to me). With time, prayers, and good thoughts I **KNOW** that I will be on stage, in the choir loft, at game night cleaning up playing Oodles, and most importantly of all... just being with the greatest group of friends ever. I really do feel blessed and thank all of you for your well wishes and prayers as I have been doing more and more of the past few weeks.

Monday, I went for my first blood work. Tuesday, I was called and was informed that it came back good. Wednesday, I returned to the doctor who is quite happy with the progress I have made and that my numbers are good. However, I will most likely be on coumadin (a blood thinner with a hint of rat poison ☹) for the rest of my days because of the clots in my lungs. He assured me that the clots will dissolve in time.

No more testing for 4 weeks and no more doctor visits for 3 months... will that be **JUNE?** when little ones will still be going to school after the long winter.

Sunday morning will be my first day back at work... which means I will miss another of my friends' performances at their church. **UGH!**

At least I am in good company. Last weekend during an Oscar

party, tennis great [Serena Williams](#) was rushed to a hospital. Apparently, she had clots in her lungs. I know that she has been laid up for a few months with other injuries but if this can happen to an active professional sports figure then I guess it can happen to a 30-something guy who truly enjoys taking long, brisk walks (something else on mu "can't wait to get back to doing" list).

Once again, thank you all for all of your thoughts and prayers. I pray to and thank God everyday that He and my special angel are watching over me. I believe that He is not finished with me yet. Now how to take those things I feel so strongly about and use them in such a way as to show glory to Him. Being a song leader and occasional choir member at mass is a great start...

Thanks again and All Glory and Praise to Him!

Florida 2011 – Trip Diary – Part 2

Sunday January 16 – We drove over to Congo River mini golf to try to feed the gators they have there, which never works out because it's usually too cold in January for the cold-blooded gators to care much about eating, and this time was no exception. But we spent a long time just watching the gators and their habitat-mate turtles climbing around and over each other, getting in and out of the water – kind of like a free little zoo exhibit. My kids are too little to enjoy or let us enjoy playing mini-golf, so we went to Sizzler for an all-you-can eat lunch buffet. We spent the afternoon relaxing at the house so Hubby could watch the Chicago Bears game and the kids

could swim, and we even took a dip ourselves at half-time. For dinner, we went to Medieval Times, which is a dinner show – it is SO fun!!! Everyone is seated around an arena, and the audience eats a Medieval-style feast while watching a show complete with horse, knights, and jousting. You are assigned a seat in a certain color section (we were green – note the crown in the picture below), and you cheer on your color knight in the jousting and games – it's a blast!!



After watching the knights duke it out, Grandma took the kids back to the house and we took Jamy on the extreme go-karts at Fun Spot. The track called The Vortex is wicked; you wind up and around 3 or 4 times until you reach the top, and it's strange to be up so high in a go-kart. But you don't really have time to think about that, because there is a steep drop down, followed by a couple of hairpin / bowl-like turns that you have to navigate as driver of the kart! Super fun, though not for everyone. We thought this is what caused Jamy's back injury that ended up plaguing his trip, but turns out it was something else. And we took our daughters on these go-karts later in the week – with helmets of course – and our oldest hated them and wouldn't let me use the accelerator; it was SO frustrating!! Our daredevil 6-year-old Sammie loved it though, and I found her to be a passenger more willing to go my speed – pedal to the metal!!

Monday January 17 – We ate breakfast at Sizzler at their breakfast buffet, and then headed out to Universal Studios as

planned despite the dire forecast of rain all day, and the weathermen were not mistaken. It was like a monsoon when we arrived, and scarcely let up all day. Many of the rides at Universal are indoor, but Hubby and I did take a bit of a gamble (and lost) when we got in line for the new Rip Ride Rockit coaster. They had to shut the ride down when they saw lightning, and wouldn't you know it, we were first in line! After investing that much time waiting, we really didn't want to get out of line, but the kids were waiting with Grandma and Jamy, so we called them to see if they were ok and able to stay dry. We waited probably about 20 minutes, and it was fun to try to read the different hand signals and procedures the staff was doing to see if we would get to ride soon or not. Finally, they opened the coaster, and we were first – test rats. This coaster looks more intimidating than it is, mostly because the first lift is straight up, face pointed at the sky, your back is parallel to the ground. Other than that, it's a pretty lame coaster; the best thing about it is that you get to choose a song to listen to while you're on it, and your song choice plays in the speakers behind your head. I chose "Devil Went Down to Georgia" which made a very good coaster theme song, but the coaster was so tame that I was able to do some air-fiddling along to the song. I heard Hubby beside me rocking out to Gloria Gaynor's I Will Survive, and that seemed like fun too, but I wasn't about to wait in line again for this ride. The other thing that stank about the Rip Rockit is the rain – riding a coaster in the rain is not a lot of fun. The rain pelts your face; it hurts and you can't see anything, so it takes a lot of the fun out of it. And oh yeah, this is how soggy we looked when we were done riding:



Most of us made the best of the rain; after all, where we were from in Ohio the weather was sub-zero, so rainy 50's still felt good to us. Our oldest was not a happy camper, however, and she soon grew tired of walking around in the rain, even though Grandma splurged and bought the kids ponchos – I didn't think to bring any, but maybe I will next time. It never does the all-day-rain thing in Florida! It usually rains or storms for less than an hour and then the sun comes back out so we were unprepared for the all day down-pour. But seriously, how could Universal be anything but fun? Even though the rain slowed us down a bit, we were still able to catch our first glimpse of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter – it was very cool!!

Hogwarts castle was amazing, and I guess I must have misplaced the picture I made Hubby take of me in Hogsmeade, which was beautiful at night. We got some Butterbeer, and it was yummiier than the version we attempted at one of our game nights here in Ohio. The Wizarding World has 3 rides, and we only had time to get on The Forbidden Journey on this day – that's the one inside the castle. While you wait in line, there is plenty to see – it looks like you are on the movie set except better because it doesn't look like a set – it looks real! The portraits move and talk, and there are 3D projections of Harry, Ron, and Hermione that look like real people. As you wind around the corridors of the castle, you get to explore many scenes straight from the books and movies: Dumbledore's office, Gryffindor common room – even the Sorting Hat makes an appearance! And the ride itself is *amazing*!! If

you are a Harry Potter fan, this area is a **must-see!!** Though we did have a slight oopsie – while trying to rush over to the Harry Potter World before the park closed, we skipped lunch, so now we were cold, wet, and hungry. It would have been ok, except that once we snaked throughout the corridors of the Hogwarts castle, we learned that the Forbidden Journey ride was down. After waiting in the dark hallway listening to the Sorting Hat give his spiel over and over and on empty stomachs, we had had it – especially grumpy oldest who, if you remember, was not happy with the day at Universal in the rain to begin with. Our torturous wait in the hallway of Hogwarts became so irritating that I wished my husband had bought the flaming wallet we had seen at the magic show – so we could throw it at the Sorting Hat, flames and all! ☐

We did finally get on the ride, and it was awesome, but my oldest neglected to try it – she doesn't like anything faster or more thrilling than the Scrambler. As I said, the ride was amazing, so now we were all famished after a day at Universal. But being budget-conscious we wanted to leave the parks before finding dinner, though I must confess: I was so hungry that the idea of the 'whopper bar' on Universal's City Walk that had turned my stomach that very morning was actually sounding quite good after a day walking around in the rain! We ended up at Denny's, which is a place I hadn't been to in probably over a decade, and while the food wasn't great, it sufficed.

(to be continued in part 3)

Over The Rainbow In A Different Oz

Tonight sees the opening of what sounds like a different production of [The Wizard of Oz](#). Produced by Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, the London premiere has all the elements of the classic 1939 movie however, it has added elements which (according to Sir Andrew) make it more suitable to the stage.

Added are 4 songs which give Glinda, The Wicked Witch of the West, and the Wizard a chance to use their singing chops.

Apparently, the Good Witch's short bit in Munchkinland does not count as a song. For the new songs, Lloyd Webber re-teamed with lyricist Tim Rice a partnership which dissolved 30 years ago after *Evita*.

Casting for Dorothy was done in what seems to be the Lord's new-found trademark: the televised talent show. He did it for Joseph, Maria in *The Sound of Music*, and now for Oz. I dunno about this American Idol meets theatre concept.

A familiar name was cast in the title role. Michael Crawford (the original Phantom of Lloyd Webber's production) was number one on the list. I can actually picture Mr. Crawford in the roles of Professor Marvel and the Great Humbug. Wonder how many other roles he will be filling. [Taylhis](#), how many parts did Frank Morgan have in the movie?

This July, [Fountain City Festival](#) will be performing a version closer in production to the original movie. As soon as I get back on my feet... I really pray that it is soon... I look forward to helping to bring one of my favorite shows to the stage.

Florida 2011 – Trip Diary – Part 1

Friday January 14 – We left our hometown about 4:40pm after loading the car, getting kids' school stuff stashed for the week off, the gas tank filled up, and some snacks from the drive-thru for the kids. I noted the dashboard temp at 20°F. Around 8pm, we found a Goldstar Chili to stop at in Westchester, a suburb of Cincinnati – we love to stop for Cincy chili and coneys! We took about an hour there, giving the little ones some time to run off some steam since there weren't many people there that time of night. Luckily we asked first and that's how we learned that the McDonald's Playland across the street had been removed – otherwise we would have taken 4 kids into the Playplace-shaped McDonald's and had much disappointment to contend with. Dinner went well, despite the waitress' well-meaning attempt to reward our cute kids with balloons – *helium balloons*. Really, lady? 4 helium balloons to add to the 6 people and the 6 people's week's worth of luggage in the mini-van about to trek 1000 miles? So we managed to sneak out of the restaurant with only 2 balloons, and one popped right after we got on the expressway – thankfully it wasn't too distracting to driver Hubby or we would have all been in trouble. That last balloon made it all the way down to Florida with us, and it bopped around our rental house for the rest of the week until I "forgot" to pack it for the trip home. After the Goldstar stop, the kids bedded down for the night, and they were all out by 10:30 – not bad, not bad at all!! I had such a great time talking with Hubby and keeping him company as we drove down the country together that I didn't want to go to bed, but I made myself try for some shut-eye around 2:30am. I do really like the schedule we've made for these long drives to Florida, but there is just one downside – the most beautiful part of our trip, the winding drives through the breathtaking

Tennessee mountains, is always done during the night when we cannot see anything outside but the lights of the towns in the valleys far below. Hubby (and me) arrive in Florida tired, but the kids are well rested, and this is a way to break up the monotony of a 20+ hour car ride for those kids.

Saturday January 15 – We all woke up around 6:30am when we stopped for gas; I can't remember where we were. But the kids were in good moods, and the sunrise was beautiful. Since the south was just coming out of a cold snap at this time, the air had an odd smell to it – a hard-to-describe tropical-climate-frozen-over kind of smell. The kids awoke in wonderful moods, and we ate up all the miles we could until we began to get hungry for breakfast. We decided to stop first for breakfast and then head to the beach since we had made the extra 90 minute jaunt over to the coast to visit while we were in the area. We chose St. Augustine Florida since it's coastal, and I had been there as a kid and kind of wanted to see it again. But when we got off the expressway, there was no place for a family breakfast. The Shoney's that was on the roadside attraction sign had turned into a Chinese buffet, and even if we decided to stomach Chinese food for breakfast, they were not open at 8 in the morning. So we headed east to the coast, and we found St. Augustine to be somewhat of a ghost town. There were shuttered buildings and for lease signs everywhere; it was sad. There seemed to be 2 sections to the city, however, and while the one section was full of shuttered attractions, empty storefronts and loiterers, the 'original' part of St. Augustine was bustling and beautiful. Hoards of people were walking around the streets near the quaint shops, and we found our first glimpse of the ocean beyond the [Castillo de San Marcos](#). We weren't able to stay long since everyone was starving and St. Augustine does not seem to have any family-type restaurants (mostly seafood and steak here), but we did get to glimpse some of the oldest city in the United States and marvel at the narrow streets as we tried to find our way out. We got back on I-95 and exited miles south;

near Palm Bay, I think – everyone was SO hungry at this point I wasn't paying much attention to where we were, just that there was food nearby. The Golden Corral here was excellent and satisfied our hunger pangs quite well. And I have to note how incredibly amazing those hungry, tired kid behaved!!! All they wanted was to get to the beach, and they were SO hungry, but they were SO patient while we looked for food – unbelievable!! Next it was time to find a beach, so we drove east and found a nice place where we had been before. It's a minimal \$2 toll to get over a bridge and to the coast, but well worth it since there is ample parking and shelters with bathrooms and showerheads to get the sand off.



We had a great time at the beach, even if it was cold (I think in the 50s – I'm writing this so long after it's hard to remember!) and the locals were walking along the coastline wearing hats and gloves while we were wading. The kids LOVED the beach, but we got cold and very tired since we were on minimal sleep, so we threw everyone into the car; most of the kids were half-dressed. At this point, all we wanted to do was get to our rental house in Orlando, and we were so excited when we spotted Orlando's familiar landmarks along the I-4 corridor. But we had one stop to make – Downtown Disney to check how many Disney World tickets we had left – you can't do this over the phone anymore. Downtown Disney was MOBBED and we were a bit discouraged, but then again, we go through this every time we take a trip to Florida- we think it's crowded

down there, but everything ends up ok. This year was quite crowded comparatively, so we asked a Disney cast member, and they summed it up in one word, "Brazilians." After she said that, looking around, there were a lot of Brazilians, I guess because in January it's their summer vacation since they are in the southern hemisphere. But anyway, my husband was walking around Downtown Disney, trying to find our ticket info, and things had been so crazy when we dropped him off, that he got out of the car without his shoes (remember he was on 0 hours of sleep!). So he's walking around Downtown Disney, confused, shoeless, and smelling like the ocean – people are staring, some are laughing. Then he realizes – his toenails are painted!! He had promised our 6 year old a week before that if she was good about getting up and going to school in the morning for a whole week, she could paint Daddy's toenails. We and some random strangers had a good laugh about that.

We left Downtown Disney, and we were SO anxious to get to the house we made a beeline straight for it except for one problem – we were an hour early for check-in. So we headed back to the tourist area (Irlo Bronson Highway), and we looked for some timeshare presentations to sign up for. Don't get me wrong, it's not that we like to do timeshare presentations, but we've gotten great at saying no, and Hubby and I used to make little games we'd play (insert funny random word in the conversation, things like that) that would make the 2-3 hours fly by. Plus they would feed you and pay you for your time, so we recovered some of our vacation expenses that way. Little did we know that the Orlando vacation scene is changing – timeshare presentations are no longer a dime a dozen; in fact, we never found one that paid enough to be worth our time.

So we're trying to kill an hour before we could get to the house, and we make a stop at the gift shop when we realize that most of the kids are not even dressed. So I open the

back of the van, and everything that we had just haphazardly thrown in the back when we left the beach tumbles out – including our bag of collected seashells. So I'm picking up the seashells from the parking lot, one by one, and since I was half asleep, I didn't really notice what I was doing until I heard, "Uh, Mom..." I look in my hand, and I had picked up a couple of someone's old discarded cigarette butts!! Having had barely any sleep, I lost it then, and I laughed with the kids until I cried.

We pulled ourselves together and made it back to the house, which was finally ready – YAY!!! Hubby took the kids in the pool while I unloaded and unpacked – I was happy to do this chore without little ones underfoot, and their behavior on the long drive was so incredibly stellar that they deserved a swim. In a couple of hours, some of our fellow vacationers arrived (my mom and our friend Jamiahsh), and we headed out for some stuffed Chicago style pizza at Giordano's. We have had the question, why go all the way to Florida to get Chicago-style pizza, but it was YUMMY and we had gotten a Groupon for it which saved us money.

After that, Hubby and I went out together while the kids stayed with Grandma and Jamy, but we didn't do much – we were still looking (in vain) for timeshare presentations to attend. We went to Old Town, which is an area in Orlando set up like an old-fashioned midway. There are blocks of little shops – and bars, which were overflowing this Saturday night with intoxicated people- and carnival and thrill rides at either end of the strip of shops. We normally have fun at Old Town, but I don't think we will be going back on a Saturday night- definitely wasn't for kids.

(continued in part 2, a more abbreviated version!)

And thoughts turn to spring

This past weekend was the start of actual baseball Spring training games. As a moderately avid fan, I take a bit of interest in these early games. It makes no difference as to the win or the lose portion at this point in time. I just like to see if it looks like my favorite teams will have a good year or not.

Too early to tell yet. Starting pitchers are still stretching out. First the 2 inning games, then maybe 3 innings, ect. Starters from the year before will get a couple of at bats before they are taken out to see the younger 'talent'. It is at this time of the year, when you can see possible future hall of famers work out with the big league squads. You also see the veterans trying for one more shot at making a big league team.

I've been told, but have yet to experience, that spring training is a fan's wonderland. The players are accessible, and tickets to games are inexpensive. Some camps even have open training sessions.

Someday I will make that journey. I will head south in the later parts of February to March. Maybe I will watch a game or two, or just spend a day walking around a ball field. A day in the sun, visiting a bit of spring in the fading days of winter.

Drifter

I really like this song our church worship band has been playing lately. Enjoy Drifter:

Truly Divine Intervention

The past few days have been a big ol' slap in the face, whack over the head, ice water thrown in your face. Monday morning, I got out of the shower and noticed that my left leg was swollen to twice the size of my right. I had a doctors appt made to see what he could tell me about my on-going aches. It is a good thing I did. Five minutes after arriving I was on my way to the hospital for an ultrasound. Shortly after, I was admitted with a "extensive blot clot that extended from my left groin to my foot." So much for a little nagging ache.

A few hours later, I underwent a CT scan which informed me that the clot had broken up and was now in both lungs so I was moved to ICU. I was indeed very fortunate. Someone was really looking out for me!

This is the first time I had been in the hospital since my tonsilectomy back in the 5th grade some 20+ years ago and that was pretty much in and out. I was home by Thursday but man... all that poking and prodding and not sleeping can take its toll. And more to continue... words like blood thinners and blood tests... YUCK! But I am here and mean to reflect on that and ask HIM to take control and help me go forward in whatever ways HE deems necessary.

The doctor is convinced that the 2 hour plane trip to Florida a month ago was a major factor in the clot. I know I am not as old as I was in '92 when I flew to Hawaii, but WOW!

Thank you all for your thoughts and prayers and hopefully with His help, I will be back 1000% soon.

Right Out Of Flipper

Came across this inspiring animal story, and since I haven't had the time to blog about any of the (mostly yucky) personal issues going on right now, I thought this would make a nice feel-good post. I'm still working on that Florida trip diary, really, I am!! But in the meantime, here is a story about some dolphins who saved a dog's life. This happened in Marco Island Florida, where we took our wonderful honeymoon almost 12 years ago.

[Dolphins Save Dog](#)

Monkey, Er, Ape See – Ape Do

To take a break from the vacation unpacking, I took the little ones to the zoo a few weeks ago. We had a great time – oh how I love winter zoo visits! There aren't many people around, and the animals can act like the animals they are instead of worrying about the hoards of visiting humans. Well, most of the time it's cool to see the animals acting like animals, unless they are doing disgusting things like the gorillas last week – don't watch this if you are squeamish, but I have to publish it because of how embarrassed the gorilla seems about her behavior. I felt so badly for filming her after she tried to hide that I turned off the camera, and that's when she got up and went and sat behind a post – out of my view. Why would she do something so gross if she is embarrassed by it?

WARNING: it's VERY gross!!!

The chimp was another story! His name is Harvey, and he is a senior citizen chimp – he just had his 52nd birthday, which is quite a milestone for a chimpanzee. Despite his age, Harvey is quite playful and has a penchant for young kids. When we walked over in front of Harvey's window, he was sitting in the corner wearing a sparkly lei, presumably from his birthday party which had just taken place days before.



When he saw us, he pulled off his lei and came over to his window to see the kids and play:

These videos were taken almost a month ago, and I've been trying to get back to the zoo, but my oldest child has decided that the zoo is "boring" – her words, *NEVER* mine. In fact, I'm wondering if I need a DNA test – how could someone with my DNA find the zoo boring???

During the week, I'm so tired and have so much to do that just writing this blog post is quite a challenge – I'm having a towel thrown over my head by my 2-year-old as I write! I think I fell in love with Harvey that January day, and I miss him!