

Best Way To Spend 88 Cents

According to JJ my parakeet, the best way to spend 88 cents is on this little number:



I saw this little bird toy at Walmart the other day, and even though I knew it would scare the heck out of my scaredy-cat parakeet, I bought it anyway. It's a piece of plastic in the shape of an upside-down T – a perch for the bird to sit on, while the part that sticks up hold millet sprays – a favorite treat for parakeets.

I adopted my little guy JJ (short for Jungle Jack Hanna named after my favorite celeb) back in January, and he hasn't ever been interested in playing with any of the toys in his cage. My 2-year-old son used to bang on JJ's cage, and so the little bird became afraid of people, and I haven't been able to pet him in months – he flies away from me. I was so afraid that he led a miserable existence locked away safely in my bedroom – until about a month ago, when I moved him from our bedroom (where he was by himself most of the time) to the living room (the centerpiece of most of our large family's traffic patterns). JJ has been SO happy to be a part of the action! I've been happy to see him happy, but he still wasn't playing with toys – until I bought this 88 cent Walmart Wonder on a whim. At first, JJ kept his distance, and I feared I was right – he WAS afraid of everything! I had to leave the house for awhile, and when I returned, the millet was gone from the toy – I was ecstatic!

The next day, I snapped the above picture of JJ perched on his new toy, and ever since, he's been in love with his 88 cent Walmart toy! He sits next to it and preens himself, and he even gazes at it lovingly.

I reiterate – BEST 88 cents spent (on a pet) EVER!!

Playing Tourist In Toledo

It began with terrible news – my husband's uncle had a massive heart attack and was in a coma. His uncle was in Youngstown Ohio, on his way from Illinois to Washington DC where he was going to take his two sons for a vacation. A week ago Sunday, we packed up our family and were ready to head to Youngstown to be with the boys since they didn't have any other family in the area, but at the last minute, we found out that their mom was on her way.

We were all packed and ready to go, plus the summer almost got by without us taking a family vacation. Sure, we had some fun excursions with extended family and friends, but nothing with all 6 of us, just the 6 of us. So we changed our destination from Youngstown to Toledo, cut out a bunch of that driving, and were able to utilize a hotel gift certificate that had been burning a hole in our pockets. Although Toledo is not our home town, we live only an hour away so we visit often, which is why I used the term 'playing tourist'.

We went to the zoo (for the umpteenth time, but I could never get sick of the zoo, NEVER!), ate some delicious food, and swam in the hotel pool a bunch. We visited a mall; something I haven't done in probably over a decade (I don't count our local mall – it's more than half vacant, and its food court has only one restaurant left!), and I was disappointed to

learn that the mall's Dippin' Dots store (which is the only one anywhere nearby) DOES NOT carry my favorite flavor – Root Beer Float! But the Dippin' Dots were still delicious, and besides, that's just one more thing that makes Orlando that much more special – plenty of Root Beer Float Dippin' Dots in the store near Disney World, how I miss that place. We couldn't believe how crowded the Toledo mall was on a Wednesday afternoon, and because I hadn't been in one in years, there were all these new gadgets, gizmos, and what-nots that our family had to check out and play around with, probably making us look like total hicks. But that's ok, we had fun! And not only do I love living in a rural area because we have no crime, crowds, or traffic, but it makes things like visiting malls or big movie theaters rare treats and fun vacations!



4 party animals in the hotel

Probably the most fun I had on this vacation was when we rented a pontoon boat and took it into Lake Erie. Now, don't be fooled by stats – You wouldn't know that Lake Erie is the second smallest of the Great Lakes in surface area when you're out there on a boat – you go out far enough, and you can't see shore, like all of the Great Lakes. When we looked at a map when we got home, we found that we had barely even gotten into the lake, yet it took us about 30 minutes to get there and there was water as far as the eye can see. Setting Lake Erie apart from the others is its relatively shallow depths, at

least on the west side of the lake where we were visiting – the water averaged 1-3 feet in depth! It looked really strange to see people *standing* in the lake, really far from shore, with water only up to their knees!

There were some interesting and fun islands to explore; we anchored our boat near the Woodtick Peninsula and waded onto the beach for some sea shell hunting and sand playing.



My kids were well behaved on the boat, and they enjoyed themselves, with the little guy even finding time for his afternoon nap.



(Note the can of precious Coke Zero clutched in his hand. He stole it from his dad, but apparently it didn't help keep him awake!)

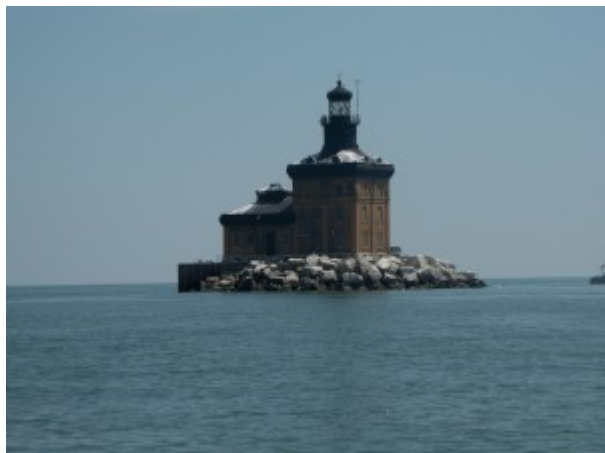
We wanted to dock at a cool looking place called Turtle Island, but it didn't seem very kid-friendly – maybe next time

if Hubby and I can get back for date night. [Turtle Island](#) (click the link for more history) was once destined to be a great resort island, but plans fell through, and it remains abandoned. There are some abandoned structures that remain on the island, including an old lighthouse and an old-fashioned crane (on the right of the island in this picture).



Since Turtle Island is way out in the lake, you wouldn't expect there to be wildlife, but we saw this fox looking for fish on the beach – so cool to see!! Perhaps because of the shallow nature of this part of Lake Erie, animals can just walk out to the islands, or maybe the fox was a stowaway. Pardon the bumpiness of the video – taking pictures and video was something I struggled with the entire time on the bobbing boat!

There is also a “haunted lighthouse” (in reality it’s called the [Toledo Harbor Light](#)) that looks very cool and emits a ghostly warning horn every few minutes.



As we were floating nearby gaping at it, a Coast Guard boat came speeding up to us, lights flashing and all. What the...? There were four Coast Guard officers on the boat, all armed, and the one in charge informed us that they “had the authority of the US government” and were going to board our boat and search it.

As serious as it seemed, they must have liked what they saw because we were awarded a “good as gold” form, which means that we had been following all the maritime laws and regulations. But it was kind of a strange experience to be all alone floating in the middle of Lake Erie one minute, only to have a boat full of gun-wielding government agents on your case the next... They were nice enough, I suppose, but sheesh, why our boat? Later when we returned to shore, the owner of the boat rental place said that in all their years of renting out their boats, none of their clients had ever undergone a boarding inspection by the Coast Guard. Lucky us. Perhaps with all my kids on board, they were suspicious of some illegal Canadian smuggling, eh?

Despite all the high-seas adventure, the vacation was fun and so refreshing to be able to spend time together as a family without distraction, not having to worry about household

chores, responsibilities, or Dad's work for a few days. Just what I needed to get out of my kids-are-fighting-constantly-rut at home, and hey – I even lost track of that back-to-school countdown I had been swearing by before the vacation!

And the best news of all this? Hubby's uncle has been released from the hospital and is now recovering at home. Time will tell us what he will need to make his heart healthier, but for now, he is out of immediate danger and for that, we are so thankful!

What If...

Tomorrow night my church gets to host the world premiere of a movie titled "What If..." at our Elgin campus. Since my small group normally meets Monday nights, we agreed to go to the movie instead. Since our church is at four campuses (five including a small one in the city) with 2-3 services at each, this single event at a single campus promises to be a crowded one, especially at the price they are charging- free. Just today I learned this world premiere comes probably thanks to the director, Dallas Jenkins, joining the staff at the church as Director of Visual Media. He is the son of author [Jerry B. Jenkins](#) (best known for coauthoring the Left Behind series). Hmm... a [partnership with a well-known actor](#), and now a movie director, son of a famous author on staff, not to mention my pastor whose name is out there- have you heard of the radio program [Walk in the Word](#)?- should I worry about my church becoming too public? In any event, I am looking forward to the movie and meeting the three stars afterward. I wonder if this appearance was part of their contract? So- all I have to do is make sure I finish work no later than 5PM so I can get there- a half-hour drive from the store I end at in St.

Charles (and a mere 5 min. from the store I start at-aargh!). In any event, here is a link to the trailer. ~~Sorry, I couldn't find it on youtube so I couldn't embed it:~~ FOUND IT!

