

# Florida 2011 – Trip Diary – Part 3

Tuesday January 18 – We began the day at Sizzler's breakfast buffet, again. If you are noticing a pattern, you won't be surprised to see this in the diary for pretty much every day of the week. The prices there were great (\$3.99 per adult and kids were free!), the food wasn't bad, and it left our group full enough to sustain us until mid-afternoon, which saved us a lot of money. Today was Epcot day, and it was a great day – the sun finally came out, and the temp was in the low 70s. We rode the usual favorites, and we got to take our daughter Disney on my favorite Epcot ride Soarin' for the first time because she was finally tall enough – and she liked it! Epcot has a World Showcase which is an area set up like different countries, so we took the ferry to Germany and walked to Japan for their delicious snow cones. We walked around the lake through Morocco and Italy, and stopped in Norway and Mexico for their boat rides which are very cool. Someday I would like to visit the countries in Epcot, sampling the ethnic foods as I go – but that's more of a retirement plan since the kids would never go for that now! Oh, and we ran into Stitch in America!



After the day at Epcot, we sent the little ones home with Grandma, and Hubby, Jamy and I attempted to find a good place to eat dinner, but to our surprise, there

weren't many good dinner choices left at 10pm, even in Orlando. We ended up at Perkins – famished – and they were out of most everything I asked for. I stomached the sandwich I got, which wasn't very good, and Hubby was not too happy with his salad. We did end up with a box of Eclairs to go, and those were pretty good – well, what little of them we had anyway once the kids got a hold of them. Our friend Derek arrived that night while we were sleeping, so our next day would see one more joining our group...

Wednesday January 19 – Breakfast at Sizzler (did you think I was exaggerating about eating there every day?), then on to the Magic Kingdom where we spent a fun-filled day. We learned that there is an expansion planned and under construction to double the size of Fantasyland, so we are looking forward to seeing that on a future visit. Splashwater Falls was undergoing maintenance (usually does in January when we go, but this is a small price to pay for ideal weather and low crowds – BEST time to visit Orlando!!), but we enjoyed the classics like Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (and little Disney liked this one, even though it is a roller coaster!), Jungle Cruise, Haunted Mansion, Pirates of the Caribbean, and Hubby's and my personal favorite that many others find to be lame, The Carousel of Progress. We skipped out on Space Mountain this time, mainly because the kids wouldn't have liked it, and we don't find that its long wait is worth it for a herky-jerky outdated roller coaster. If you are into indoor roller coasters in the dark, I've always liked the Aerosmith one at Disney's MGM, er, Hollywood Studios, although we never find that park worth the time for a visit since there isn't much there. And [King's Island](#) in Mason Ohio outside of Cincinnati has a SUPER dark coaster called Flight of Fear. But back in Orlando, the People Mover ride in the Magic Kingdom, an elevated train-type ride that goes all around Tomorrowland, treated us to a one-of-a-kind glimpse inside Space Mountain – *with the lights on!!* The People Mover travels into the Space Mountain building, but usually you can only see the glowing

streaks of the ride trains as they zip past. Because of a ride malfunction, the lights in the building were on, so we got an insider's view of all the tracks and trains which was pretty cool!! After the Magic Kingdom, Derek, Chris and I took the two oldest kids to Fun Spot to try the extreme go-karts, but it didn't go over so well. The oldest hated them, and she made me go putt-putt-putt all the way up the spiral and around the track – that was not fun; I'm more pedal-to-the-metal! But we all took a spin on the bumper cars, and that was some great old-fashioned family fun that everyone was able to enjoy.

Thursday January 20 – Breakfast at Sizzler (every day – told ya!), then on to our second day at Universal, this time with Derek, although we lost one because by now, Jamy's back pain was so bad that he had to stay in the rental house and relax all day. Thankfully it did not rain this time, and we had a wonderful day. It was a bit chilly, but we couldn't resist the urge to ride Bluto's Barges 3 (or was it 4? I can't remember) times in a row – we were drenched! Smarter ones in our group (Derek and Grandma) opted to stay out and stay dry, but those of us who got off soaked (and shivered) had a blast. It's a large round boat that's propelled down a raging river of rapids; every time it dips, the riders on that side get drenched by a wave that cascades over the wall of the boat. Then there are waterfalls and waterspouts – it's so much fun to bond with the strangers in your boat as you take turns laughing over who gets soaked and who dodges the torrents of water – whether everyone speaks English or not, there is bonding in the boat! Next it was on to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, and I think I talked about this earlier in this diary – it's amazing; that's all I need to repeat. We went on the Forbidden Journey ride again, this time with Derek, and he really liked it. Unfortunately, they decided that Sammie had shrunk an inch or two since Monday, and she no longer met the height requirement, so she had to wait in the child swap room – which is actually quite entertaining because

they have the old Harry Potter movies playing, and I had forgotten how young Harry Potter (actor Daniel Radcliffe) was when the movies began.

After Universal, we went to the McDonald's largest Playplace where the kids had a blast. Grandma stayed with them while Hubby, Derek and I went to the Titanic attraction I've always wanted to see. Unfortunately, our adventure was a bit marred when Hubby was pulled over and ticketed for U-turn in a No U-turn intersection. In our opinion, it should have been a warning – clearly we were tourists, it was an honest mistake, he didn't do it when there was oncoming traffic present so no one was in direct danger, and of the 3 people in the car, not one of us saw the (supposed) no U-turn sign. Personally, I think Orlando should treat their tourists a little more like the guests that they are, especially considering how much money the average tourist brings into their local economy. Also, they seemed to milk us for every penny – the ticket itself was very expensive, and because we were from out of town, we couldn't even show up to traffic court and contest the ticket, not to mention that when we returned home, we were bombarded with offers of traffic school via mail, which showed that they were looking for even more money by selling our info to these traffic schools so they could bombard us with ads. A frustrating episode in our otherwise super vacation, but that's enough – traffic ticket tangent over!

So back to the Titanic exhibit... I've always wanted to see it, but it's quite pricey, and we were always nervous about spending so much on trying something new that we didn't even know would be worth the cost or not. So enter Groupon – before we left, there was a Groupon for Titanic, and we got it. It kind of obligated us to fitting this in since we already had tickets, but with the money we saved on Groupon, it was worth it. And, we even made it on time, getting pulled over and all! Upon entry, each visitor gets a little card with the name and info of a Titanic passenger, and one of the rooms at the end of the tour has a wall with all the names of the passengers on it. The lights go down, and the names of

the passengers who survived stay bold while the names of those who perished are hollow, so you can see if “your” passenger made it. Mine survived, which I had guessed correctly because she had been a first class passenger. Our tour guide (portraying the famous Titanic personality “Unsinkable” Molly Brown) was very knowledgeable about all things Titanic, but our friend Derek’s passenger card stumped her – the name on his card was half-solid, half-hollowed, so we don’t know if he made it through the ill-fated voyage or not. But overall, it was a lot of fun, and a well spent hour or two. I’ve always been a Titanic buff (excluding the movie which I feel really commercialized, cheapened, and capitalized on the tragedy and the great loss of life involved – enough about that), so this museum was right up my alley. There were re-creations to see and explore (a first class cabin, the deck, which they had even chilled to provide an example of the actual temperature that night, and the grand staircase, see picture below), as well as actual artifacts recovered from the bottom of the ocean, like dishes. There was room after room of signs to read and pictures to look at, and as much as I don’t like the movie, they even had a few costumes and props from it which were interesting to see. Among my favorite parts of the exhibit: the hall of newspapers, which had newspaper editions reporting the disaster in 1912 from all over the country, complete with early 20th century advertisements and other news articles.

I also found this quite remarkable: it was an ordinary cooler, and the exploration staff autographed it and put it down at the bottom of the ocean where the Titanic now lies. I forgot how long it was there, but it’s not nearly as long as the remains of the ship have been there, and this is what the ocean pressure did to it:



Interesting as it may be, it is a sad representation of what will happen to the remains of the luxury liner itself. Scientists estimate that it won't last more than 50 additional years if people don't find a way to salvage it and bring it up for study.



Hubby and I in front of the actual sized re-creation of the Titanic's Grand Staircase

After Titanic, we stopped at Dippin' Dots, but it was our only taste of the delicious ice creamish treat for this trip, and I was SO disappointed to find out they discontinued my favorite flavor of Dippin' Dots: Root Beer Float. ☐

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# Disney World Fairy Tales (Not Quite)

I came across a really fun article awhile ago called: Confessions Of A Disney Cast Member. The article was written by a guy who spent 5 summers working at the Walt Disney World resort as a Disney cast member. If you're like me and a frequent visitor to the Magic Kingdom, then you will appreciate the following not-so-tall-tales. Even if you've never been to WDW, the following stories are fun to read. Among the entertaining stories he has to share:

*Excuse me man, are you pregnant?*

*What's more terrifying than the 38-foot drop on Disney's Big Thunder Mountain Railroad? Having to ask women in line if they're pregnant. It's for their own safety, but forget a woman scorned—hell hath no fury like a woman who's been mistaken for being pregnant. Once, when I was in training, I watched a coworker approach a larger female park visitor and ask, "Excuse me, ma'am, but are you pregnant?" "Pregnant!?!!" the woman screamed, her voice turning heads at the happiest place on earth. "No! What are you saying? Do I look fat to you?!" She turned to her friend and screamed some more: "They think I look fat. Let's get out of here!" I was so traumatized by that incident I crafted a plan to avoid offending anyone. Whenever I spotted a "suspect," I asked everybody in the vicinity—including teenage boys and women in their 70s—if they were with child. If the woman I suspected was actually pregnant, she left the ride quickly. If she wasn't, she just thought I was working a gag.*

*I sure am Randy today.*

*Disney made the "first name" name tag famous, but the tag doesn't always match the person wearing it. One day, as I was steering the raft to Tom Sawyer Island, my name tag dropped*

into the river, forcing me to get a new one. There wasn't a single "Robert" left, so until a replacement could be made, I pretended to be "Randy," a name that amused visitors from the U.K. to no end. Elderly English ladies lined up to have their picture taken with me. One screamed when she saw me, grabbed her friend, and yelled, "Is that really your name?" Being a good Disney cast member, I lied and said yes. The friend said, "You know, we love a good randy man back home." But lady, even I'm not that good a cast member.

To get onstage, dress the part.

A few attractions choose audience volunteers to be part of the show, but the selection process is far from random. Typically, you need to be a certain gender, size, and age for each of the different roles. You might even need to be wearing a specific item of clothing. On my off days from work, I used to go over to Universal Studios, and I would get picked all the time to play "Mother" in the old Alfred Hitchcock show. They needed a guy my height and weight who happened to be wearing the same type of plain white tennis shoes I always wore. Also helpful for getting picked: cuteness and enthusiasm. Curious kids who ask nicely and look excited often get extra attention, along with thrilling perks like riding up front and introducing shows.

Stroller relocation program

Disney's a family place, but the people who work there come to loathe strollers. It's part of a cast member's job to keep strollers in nice, orderly lines and to make sure they're only left in designated areas. But park visitors keep their strollers in an appalling condition, loaded up with dirty diapers, rotting bottles of milk, and half-eaten PB&J sandwiches. Others see no problem with parking their strollers right in front of an attraction's exit or entrance. Sometimes thoughtless individuals like this incur the wrath of the stroller police, and their precious Bugaboos and



*Maclarens are intentionally relocated to a place “far, far away”—at the very back of the area cordoned off for strollers.*



*Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of (confiscated) rum*  
*On special Grad Nites, when Disney hosts loads of freshly graduated high school kids, the park puts extra staffers inside Pirates of the Caribbean and other rides as lookouts to monitor less-than-legal activities. Our focus was mostly on what the kids were consuming. Booze, cigarettes—you name it, and a Disney cast member has confiscated it from a 17-year-old at one time or another. One clever kid, forced to hand over his bottle, noted the irony of getting busted in the middle of a ride that celebrates a drunken pirate orgy. “Hey, don’t the pirates have enough?” he asked. “They need mine, too?”*

*Please keep your happiness to yourself.*  
*This attraction has been camera monitored for your safety. That’s the spiel Disney broadcasts over its loudspeakers for many rides. But the cameras are also meant to protect you from yourself. One night, while most parkgoers were watching the fireworks display, a couple strolled over to Pirates of the Caribbean, where I was working. They not only had a boat to themselves, but empty boats all around them. The real fireworks display, it turned out, was visible on the security cameras to all of us working that night. Let’s just say the show the couple put on wasn’t exactly G-rated.*

If you enjoyed the above stories, you might want to [read the article in its entirety here](#), along with other theme park insider info.

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## VIPs For A Day (part three of... well, I'll try to make this the last part)

If you've read my first two blog posts about our trip to King's Island, then you know that I've rambled and chronicled, and now I'm blue in the face and ready to move on. I would like to rate most of their rides though for those who are curious and/or contemplating a visit to the theme park. Somewhere there is a Discovery Channel show about the 10 Most Extreme Roller Coasters I'd like to see – I hear King's Island has 3 or more on the list! Going to hope that it's on youtube... If you haven't read my previous post, here is my ride experience scale: 1♦ = not so good, while 5 ♦ = awesome!

**The Racer** – 3♦. A wooden racing roller coaster that doesn't really race. According to our guide, people on the different racing trains would trash-talk each other so much that they built a wall to separate the two train colors. When we rode, the first time the blue train was not operating, and the second time, the trains did not go at the same time. Still a fun wooden coaster though!

**Flight Deck** – 1♦. Formerly called Top Gun, but whatever you call it, we did not like it. It's a roller coaster whose car is suspended from the track above the car, which basically amounted to a lot of swinging. Ok for me, not my favorite, but it made my husband sick.

**Vortex** –  $\frac{1}{4}\blacklozenge$  – This one only gets a quarter star to put it on the map – my map key didn't exactly contain a zero, so let's give it a quarter star just because it's a coaster. But otherwise, yuck. Jerky, but without any real thrills. Reminds me of the Shockwave they used to have at Six Flags Great America in Gurnee Illinois. Funny how I used to ride that over and over, especially near park closing when it would empty out. We would just stay on Shockwave until they kicked us off! But as an adult, the ride type doesn't work for me.

**Invertigo** –  $3\blacklozenge$ . I need to go back on this one when it isn't lunch time! I think the Flight Deck/Invertigo/haven't had lunch yet combo did me in as I felt a bit queasy after this one. Basically, you go up and through a loop, and do the same thing backwards. The cool thing about this one is that you face other riders, which I actually don't know if that's a cool thing or not – our guide recommended we try sitting on either the front or back of this one so we didn't have to face strangers on the coaster. I did enjoy how this one whizzed through the station though, and like I said, I will have to try it again on a full stomach.

**Sponge Bob 3D Ride** –  $4\frac{1}{2}\blacklozenge$ . I really liked this one! A lot of fun, and much more movement than its counterpart at Universal Studios, the Jimmy Neutron ride. It's a 3D Sponge Bob movie where the seats move as you move about Sponge Bob's world. The scenery is great, and not only is it 3D, but the rider actually gets to move along with the movie. As a bonus, the movie is very funny, and I loved the story!

**Whitewater Canyon** –  $4\frac{1}{2}\blacklozenge$ . You know the type – a large round boat makes it way down a "river", complete with rapids, drops, and waterfalls. I always love this type of ride and much of the fun is riding it with your friends or even strangers trying to see who is going to get the most wet! The day we went, it was an unseasonal 70°, and getting wet wasn't quite as enjoyable as usual. This is actually one of the smaller versions of this type of ride that I've been on, and the boat

seated 6 people instead of the usual 8, 10, or 12 as I've seen before. But this version has an added element of fun – friends, family, and people who have ridden the ride can take revenge on riders by putting in a quarter for a chance to launch a water cannon at passing boats. This part is lots of fun, although they need to get the change machine working so more people can squirt! We went on with some kids who didn't get wet enough in their opinion, so they rode again while we kept watch at the water cannons and succeeded in getting them SOAKED!

**Backlot Stunt Coaster** – 2♦. Lameness. But remember, I'm used to Universal Studios since we try to trek to Orlando yearly. This has nothing on Universal. But I suppose for younger kids, it could instill a feeling of bravery as they race past exploding police cars. It goes kind of fast up a winding track, which is kind of different, but other than that, the excitement kind of fizzled, and the ride isn't all that long. The brightly colored cars you ride in are super-cute, but does that really matter?

**Adventure Express** –  $1\frac{3}{4}$ ♦. This is also kind of lame, which is alright, not every coaster has to be top thrill. But this one is like Big Thunder Mountain Railroad at Disney, but that is bigger and faster. Adventure Express was going alright until the rider finds himself in a climatic tunnel, climbing a lift past moving robots and everything. Then when you reach the top – nothing. Nada. Literally – the ride ends here. What the ?

**Scooby Doo and the Haunted Castle** –  $4\frac{1}{2}$ ♦. You ride through scenes of Scooby Doo trying to shoot the bad guys with a laser gun attached to your car – cool! Even better, I actually beat my husband on this one! This ride is a lot like Buzz Lightyear at Disney, and I can never even get close to Hubby's score on that one. He must have had an off-ride though, cuz the second time we rode he beat me silly again. Oh well, this ride is awesomely themed. They remembered quite a few of the

bad guys from the old Scooby Doo tv show, and there were sound bites galore. The castle looks awesome from the outside, and we even drove a Mystery Machine:



Other fun rides at this park that deserve at least an honorable mention are the railroad (just a standard train ride, but oh-so-relaxing after a huge day of coaster riding!), the Wild Thornberry's River Adventure (kind of a lame log-flume type ride, but still lots of fun), the Eiffel tower (we didn't ride it, but it was gorgeous to look at), and Dodgem (plain ole bumper cars, but when is the last time hubby and I got to ride 'n bump kid-free? I don't even remember!). Because we splurged and got the guided tour, we even had time to catch some shows – an ice show and an 80's review. The ice skaters were pretty good; especially one guy who even did a triple axle! The 80's show was fun, even though many of the performers were incapable of both singing and dancing at the same time. There was a special Michael Jackson tribute, even though he had passed away only a week before our visit. But there were afros, mullets, big bangs, leg warmers, bright colors, even giant Rubik's cubes, and it was fun to sing along to the rockin' 80's tunes. One did get the feeling however, that not one member of the show had any idea of what the '80's was actually like...

So there you have it. I've reviewed and rated the rides I rode and found worth a mention. If you are thinking of visiting, you should know that King's Island also has a huge

kids area, and many more rides I didn't mention. We tried to stay away from any rides with a lot of spinning or anything that looked too crazy (especially this one called Delirium):



It looked a little too crazy/dizzy for me; maybe if you go to King's Island, you can try it and let me know what it's like in the comments!

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## **“You Are Now Approaching Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress”**

All good things must come to an end. Wednesday was my final full day in Orlando and it was just as fun as the first. As we prepared to make our way to the Magic Kingdom, Taylor and Sammie asked me to help gather more of our slimy, shell enclosed friends. However, I decided to stay inside and help with baby Christopher. While waiting, I happened upon the old 1960s Batman movie. Yes, between seasons of the camp television classic, Adam West and company made the transition to the big screen; complete with one of the most hilariously bad moments in all of cinema: the shark repellent bat spray.

Ok... enough on the caped crusader and his cinematic adventures.

After visiting Tomorrowland (and the droning voice announcing our approach to [Mr. Disney's vision](#) of the 21st century and its catch tune "There's a Great. Big, Beautiful Tomorrow"), it was decided that Big Chris was not going to survive the rest of the day on his feet. So, while he and Lisa took the two youngest with them to get a wheelchair, Taylor, Sammie, and I went to Fantasyland to ride [Peter Pan's Flight](#). This is a ride I actually remember from Disney Land which I visited when I was 4 years-old. I don't think the ride stopped in California. However, once again I was right in the middle of a malfunction (not the wardrobe type, either).

Following the ride, I got behind the wheelchair and started pushing. Not a problem at all... not only did it keep Chris off that toe, it probably did me some good, too. It also aided in the lines at the rides. With the added bonus of baby swap for those attractions that did not allow lap holding, wheelchair access allowed us to move quicker to the ride. Not that I had wished for this to happen.

From there, we visited each and every attraction I make it a point to visit every time I visit the park. I LOVE [The Haunted Mansion](#) and its doom buggies in Liberty Square. Also never to be missed are [Splash Mountain](#) featuring the characters of Uncle Remus (I find it really strange that they have an attraction devoted to the stories but will never again release *Song of the South* on video) and [Big Thunder Mountain Railroad](#) both of which are in Frontierland. While riding BTMR, poor Sammie lost her bracelet and when we made a quick peek to see if it fell off in our car, it was nowhere to be seen.

One of my other favorites is in Adventureland (N0000, not Jungle Cruise). Pirates of the Caribbean has been updated since my last visit. It now features the voices and likenesses of Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow and Geoffrey

Rush as Barbossa. We rode Pirates more than once and surprise, surprise... it happened again. Yo, ho; yo, ho/A Pirate's life for me

At the end of the day, I was rewarded for pushing the wheelchair (not that the reward was necessary) with an all-you-can-eat lobster buffet. Of course forgetting that Chris is allergic to shellfish. On the way back to our home, his voice was getting scratchy. After we got in and made arrangements for me to get to the airport by 7, C&L went out for a few hours to get away by themselves. I was seriously going to make them if they had not. Taylor and I played some Uno since the other three were sound asleep. After Uno, T wrote out the lyrics to a song she learned with motions in music class. I always loved learning new little songs in music class. So, I will reproduce them as best I can:

### The Long-Legged Sailor

Have you ever, ever, ever in your long-legged life

Met a long-legged sailor with a long-legged wife?

No, I never, never, never in my long-legged life

Met a long-legged sailor with a long-legged wife.

For simplicity's sake I will supply the following: in each successive verse, you replace long-legged with short-legged, knock-kneed, bow-legged, and cross-legged, respectively. Did I remember all the verses, Dopey?

When C&L got back, the four of us played a final game of Uno then it was time to say goodbye to the last one's standing before going to bed.