

Magic After 112 Years

If you are a tangents.org fan, then you've already read two riveting accounts of a little tangents field trip of sorts to Cincinnati Ohio. I don't mean to be redundant, but I'm going to post my take on the excursion for my friends and remote members of my family to read my take on the trip.

We began our journey bright and early Monday morning, July 19, and I like how the other tangenteers failed to mention that the keys were accidentally locked in the trunk. Someone, I forget who (and I'm not going to mention who it was that locked the keys in the trunk except that it wasn't me), but someone had the brilliant revelation that the back seat could pull down, thus saving us a 30-mile round-trip drive to get the spare set of keys. Us 4 adults (3 of my kids were with Grandma, and my little boy stayed with a family friend since he couldn't have gone on roller coasters at King's Island the following day) crammed into a little Sunfire, and somehow I got the privileged front seat for the whole trip – hey no complaints here, I was so much less sore than I was after last year's trip – I don't think I could say that if I had been crammed in the back of the Sunfire for two days. But taking the little car was necessary because we estimate that we saved around \$70 in gas by not taking our gas-guzzling mini-van, so thanks to the owner of the Sunfire for letting us put the miles on his car.

We arrived at our first tourist destination, the wonderful Cincinnati Zoo with more than enough time (or so we thought) to explore the entire humongous zoo complex. I just love the Cincinnati Zoo – we visited years ago, and I don't really remember much about that visit, other than accidentally driving our car into the zoo... But they seemed to have fixed that entry problem by now. Hubby and I visited this zoo last year, but we didn't leave early enough, and after some delays and the 4-hour drive, we really didn't see much of the zoo.

But this year, we had left bright and early and were prepared to stay all day, despite the 90°+ weather. I was appointed tour guide (why? I don't know – I'm a pretty big zoo enthusiast, I guess, and I'm a pretty good navigator until you throw hills or mountains into the equation. And the Cincinnati Zoo has more than a few large hills and low valleys to navigate around, but we did well – Hubby and I being especially thankful that we didn't happen to have kids to carry or a double-stroller to push up all those hills in that heat!!!)

Cincinnati has a WIDE array of species to see! Some I had scarcely heard of, some I had NEVER heard of; I just wish I had taken better notes and written down which species I saw that I wanted to do more research on when I got home. Oh well, I will be back – Ohio is the only state to exhibit my favorite animal, the manatee, outside of its native Florida, and we are blessed to have not one, but TWO zoos (Cincinnati and Columbus) that exhibit this beautiful creature – so yeah, I will be back downstate to get my manatee fix. Cincinnati has two manatees that arrived from Florida just a few months ago, and they are relatively young creatures – just 3 and 4-years old. Manatees can live to be 60-70 years old, so the manatees at the Cincinnati Zoo were relatively small compared to the others I've seen in captivity. No less breathtaking, the little guys did move a little bit faster and seemed more playful than their adult counterparts. I knew about the 'Sleep With the Manatees' program that Cincinnati offers before this visit, but I was reminded again – that is of course something I would love to do. But "Sleep with the Manatees"? I think I'd probably have to call it something different since I wouldn't be doing much sleeping if I got to spend the night in the manatee exhibit! Someday...

Another remarkable, highly endangered creature housed by the Cincinnati Zoo is the [Sumatran Rhino](#). There are five rhino sub-species left on this planet, and the Sumatran is the most

rare – estimated at less than 275 individuals left in the wild. A Sumatran Rhino successfully gave birth at the Calcutta Zoo in 1889, but as decades passed without any further successful reproduction in captivity, people grew concerned and developed a program designed to save the Sumatran Rhino. Widely considered a failure, the program ran from 1984-1996 and consisted of capturing 40 wild Sumatran Rhinos and trying to reproduce them in captivity. By the late '90s, no rhinos had been born of the program, and half of the captured rhinos had died. In 1997, the United States was down to only 3 captive Sumatran Rhinos: two females (in the Los Angeles Zoo and Bronx Zoo) and one male (Cincinnati Zoo). It was decided that the animals be united for one last breeding attempt in Cincinnati. In September 2001, the first captive-born Sumatran Rhino calf in 112 years was born (this was the 6th pregnancy for the mother; the previous 5 pregnancies were not successful)! Another calf followed in 2004, but sadly that same year a disease outbreak killed all of the Sumatran Rhinos in captivity in Malaysia, reducing the number of captive Sumatran Rhinos in the world to **only eight**. Another calf was born in 2007, and that same year the calf who was born in 2001 was returned to Sumatra to try to breed him there. If you are not an animal lover like I am, then you might find my little rant about the Sumatran Rhino boring, and I apologize. But there aren't words for how fascinating it was to see an live animal walking around and making noise who is so rare in our world. Although this particular rhino species is the smallest of the 5 currently in existence, it is fascinating in other ways; such as its light coat of reddish-brown hair, its almost constant vocalizations (which we were able to witness), and its ability to twist saplings into patterns to communicate with other rhinos in the wild. A truly fascinating creature; if you are going to be in the Cincinnati area, I highly recommend stopping by the zoo and glimpsing this historic animal specimen. Here is a video of Emi's 3rd and final calf who was born in 2007:

We stopped for lunch and took in one of those 4D shows; which was alright – being in the air-conditioned theater for 30 minutes was worth the admission fee alone. The 4D consisted of a 3D movie of animals with some additional effects – water spraying, high-powered fans blowing (Ahhh...), things to poke your back, etc. The air blasters on my seat were not working, and neither were my feet ticklers, but no matter, for the air blasting sound in my ears is not one of my favorite things anyway.

By the time we got around to the other side of the zoo, I was so hot and tired that I was becoming willing to skip certain parts of the zoo. We did stop in the petting zoo, another one of my usual favorites (I know a secret spot on goats where they tend to feel sore, and my patented 'goat rubs' are usually very much appreciated... not as much in the heat though).

Two exhibit buildings of note: I really enjoyed the nocturnal house and the cat house (which housed more than just cats, and many species of animals with which I was not familiar – maybe they should change the name – 'Cat House And Friends'? 'Cats and More'? 'Cats, Etc.'? That sounds like the work of the zoo's marketing department; clearly my talents do not lie in that area). The nocturnal house had plenty of species outside of the usual fruit bats you see in the nocturnal houses of many zoos. Along with its share of nocturnal marsupials (a few species of gliders and something called a potto), Cincinnati also has vampire bats (complete with ones feeding out of little dishes of blood – delightfully and creepily fascinating!) as well as flying foxes – bats the size of my large parrot at home with faces resembling foxes or small bears.

Overall, a wonderful day with some great friends, even if it was super hot! Up next, my run-down of the following day spent at King's Island!

The Great Zoo Debate

This is a sad post for me to write – a veteran trainer, Dawn Brancheau, was killed yesterday by an Orca whale at Sea World in Orlando, Florida. Reports of the incident have been conflicting, but it seems that the trainer was pulled into the tank when the giant sea mammal grabbed her ponytail. She subsequently drowned. Unmistakably, this is a tragedy – pure and simple.

But it also re-awakens the great zoo debate – should humans be able to keep wild animals in zoos? As they say, you can take an animal out of the wild, but you can't take the wild out of the animal, and tragedies such as yesterday's incident at Sea World prove this. It is also apparent that no matter how many precautions are taken to avoid tragedy, an accident can always occur. However, I love zoos, and I strongly and truly believe that the conservation education and money raised by zoos has been and will continue to be detrimental in helping certain species survive and bounce back from the brink of extinction. Many other people disagree, and tragedies such as this and the fatal Siberian tiger mauling at the San Francisco Zoo in 2007 always add fervor to the great zoo debate, which is depicted in this video from Good Morning America and features zoo advocate Jack Hanna debating with the Vice President of an anti-zoo organization, Born Free:

In my opinion, they did not let Mr. Hanna have an equal part in the debate. He has some good points, and it's very difficult to say where the status of certain endangered species would be right now if it were not for the conservation efforts of zoos and wildlife parks – no one knows what **could** or **would** have been either way, so how can that be a part of the debate? As Mr. Roberts points out, the number of tigers has greatly dwindled over the past century. But one can also point out that no one knows for sure if it would have been worse had zoos not been educating the public about tigers or if they had not been learning how to breed them in captivity to continue the species.

The bottom line is, in my opinion, (and this is MY blog, so I get the bottom line) zoos and aquariums have taken great strides forward for the preservation of many animal species. I believe their work and conservation efforts are **invaluable** to conservation (not to mention how many thousands of jobs zoos, aquariums, wildlife parks, and conservation programs bring to societies in hundreds of countries); in fact, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums have funded more than 3,700 conservation projects in more than 100 countries and spend nearly \$70 million on conservation initiatives annually. Remember my post about the [Kihansi Spray Toad](#)? This is just **one** example of a creature that would be completely extinct (it is believed to be extinct in the wild but still exists in just two zoos in the world) if it weren't for the efforts of zoos trying to save it.

Obviously what happened in Orlando is a tragedy of great proportion. And I'm not trying to undermine it, but Dawn's friends, family, and colleagues are all stating that she was aware of the inherent risks of her job and that she would want nothing but for her work to go on despite what happened. Perhaps changes need to be made; maybe certain species of animal require bigger and better habitats and different types of interaction and stimulation – the modern zoo world is

relatively new, and experts are still learning. But I think their hard work is invaluable to the world, and I hope that someday, all of this is just as obvious to the nay-sayers as it is to us zoo-lovers.



Kind of puts this into perspective now... I wonder if Marineland in Niagara Falls Canada still allows this after recent tragedies involving the killer whale?

The Crabby Magician

Saturday was one of the funnest days I've had in a long time. I've been having *major* zoo-fever lately, and my husband knew this and renewed our Toledo Zoo membership online before I even woke up Saturday morning. When I finally arose, he said, how about going to the zoo today? So we packed up all the kids, and took advantage of the almost 50° weather and headed to the zoo. We first ate lunch at our new favorite eating establishment in the Toledo area; a place called Nick's Cafe on Reynolds Road in Maumee. They have excellent gyros and scrumptious Greek salads, just to name a couple of their

delicious dishes... pretty much everything is made from scratch. Potatoes are sliced up for french fries right there in the kitchen, gyros are off the spit, the burger meat is hand-rolled... you get the idea. Awesome food and great service too. Highly recommended from this hard-to-please food critic!

On Saturday, everyone at Nick's was staring at us because of our ~~four~~ five adorable kids – we let our oldest invite her friend along who had slept over the night before. It made for a mini-van filled to capacity, but I'm so glad we invited her because she is a great kid, a big help (especially with our little ones because in her family, she is smack dab in the middle of 5 in birth order and knows how to help in cases of sibling rivalry!), and she had never been to a zoo before! If I had known that, we would have taken her sooner... **Every kid needs to get to a zoo!** This little girl is 9-years-old and for me, a highlight of my trip on Saturday was getting to witness her experience the zoo for the first time: the cuteness of a real-life cheetah, the immensity of a white rhinoceros, the playfulness of the baby orangutans... I'm currently reading Jack Hanna's new book, *My Wild Life* right now and it details many of the trials and tribulations the Director Emeritus of the Columbus Zoo has gone through to get where he is today. In one chapter, he addresses his many critics (people who protest live animals being held captive in zoos, as well as protesting Jack's taking animals on television show appearance tours), and Jack says something in defense of these practices which I completely agree with: Captive animals are ambassadors of their cousins in the wild. We NEED to have zoos and reach out to the public with animal tv appearances; it's the only way to get people to care enough to help with conservation.

So anyway on Saturday, after lunch, we made our way to the zoo. When we first got in, we discovered there was going to be a magic show in the Museum of Science (one of those old Works Progress Administration buildings from the post-Great Depression era; I love their architecture!). We settled in

with the kids looking forward to a fun show. My husband is into magic, and we staged a magic show for our local theater company a few years ago, so I know a little bit about how some tricks are performed – enough to know that this guy hired by the Toledo Zoo last Saturday was simply *awful*. First, he began the show with a crabby demeanor. He didn't have much charisma or charm; he wasn't very good with the kids, and his tricks *stank* – everything he performed could be bought in a magic store for under \$100 – for the whole lot! And during the show, he would literally sum up his tricks with one sentence – “and that's the magic coloring book.” Also, according to my husband, he continuously broke one of the cardinal rules of magic – telling his audience what to expect ahead of time. For example, he had a ball trick where he told the audience, “Wouldn't it be amazing if the red ball were no longer on the top?” And then *magically*, it wasn't... Amazing trick, maybe; amazing magician, I think not... On top of all that, he messed up some tricks (which happens, I guess... a little hard to forgive when it involves tricks this simple, but...), and announced the fact that he did indeed mess them up! Oh well, this “magic” show was free with zoo admission. I was a little anxious after the first 7 or 8 minutes; wanting to make sure we had enough time to see actual animals, but the kids seemed to like the show, so we did not leave the magic show before its finale. I will mention that we literally broke into a run when the guy announced that he was doing a puppet show next... Our 4-year-old was asking to see it, but I cannot imagine what that guy (his name is [Chris Clark](#) and you can click on his name to visit his website if you're interested in renting a ~~magician entertainer~~ popcorn machine) would do with puppets, so we told her we missed the puppet show... Besides, we were at the zoo to see animals, and we were running out of time! Here is a picture of the crabby magician (sorry Derek for the large pics – I don't really have time to be trying to figure out how to change code):



But not a terrible experience, because look at the amazement on the face of our 4-year-old when she witnessed the “magic”:



Luckily, we did get out of the magic show in time to see lots of animals at the zoo. The elephants were moved from their outdoor exhibit to indoors, and in the process, they crossed the path right in front of us zoo visitors:



Then, the silverback (dominating male and largest) gorilla was sitting right up against the glass of his exhibit, and at the Toledo Zoo, the visitors are allowed to get right up close and personal with the great apes. Unfortunately, I had run out of available space on my camera after taking so many pictures of the worst magician in the world – I was worried people wouldn't believe me about how awful he was, so I made sure to snap lots of pics! But anyway, the silverback gorilla was right there, and as we did with the chimp just minutes before, we held up everything we had in our arsenal (double-stroller) that we thought might interest him, but all to no avail. Maybe he likes shiny things, we thought, so we held up our car keys. Maybe he will recognize babies, we decided, so we held up our 7 month old son... and no reaction (held up the baby with caution since witnessing a gorilla CHARGE a little boy and pound the glass really hard in his exhibit in Omaha Nebraska years ago)... This gorilla stayed cool as a cucumber

and didn't react to any of it.

My one complaint about this zoo visit (besides the magic show!) is: where the heck is the octopus? He is usually one of our favorite animals to see at the zoo, and this time he was missing – something else was in his tank. That's disappointing, the octopus was always fascinating for our family and fun to watch. I hope nothing bad happened to him...

Dinner at Steak N Shake after the zoo was also a fun treat – yes, even Steak N Shake is a treat when you live in a rural utopia like we do since the closest decent sit-down chain restaurant is an hour away. A fun treat (had to be something casual after a big day with 5 kids who had had a sleepover the night before), and Disney, our 2-year-old, went poopie on the potty for the first time EVER at Steak N Shake! That reminds me, we used to live in the same town – Normal, IL (which is actually anything but normal) as the very first Steak N Shake restaurant – it is (or at least was 10 years ago when we lived there) still in its original building – too bad I wasn't into history as much then as I am now... Oh well, anyway, extremely fun time at the zoo. And as I always ask the kids, what was your favorite animal that you saw today? Mine was the silverback gorilla. He was magnificent. For awhile, the gorillas were my favorite animal to see at the zoo. Then we visited frequently last summer and got to know the family of orangutans, especially dad Boomer (an extraordinary orang because he actually plays with and helps care for his offspring – orangs in the wild and even in captivity are very easily annoyed with youngsters). Boomer and the fam are doing great and only fell short of being my favorite animal at the zoo this weekend because of the close proximity of the humongous silverback gorilla... Maybe my preferences will reverse next spring when I visit and the orangs are back outside and pushing their button which sprays water upon unsuspecting zoo guests... Looking forward to that!