

# EVEN BETTER THAN I IMAGINED!!!

We are back from Illinois; actually we got back a few days ago, but things here have been so non-stop that I'm not even unpacked from the weekend trip yet – working on that this week. But I had to take a break and write about the super fun Jack Hanna show that we were able to see while in Illinois – after all my anticipating, it was somehow **even better than I had imagined!!!**

We were the first ones to arrive at Aurora's Paramount Theater (a lovely old-fashioned theater with beautiful architecture – in fact, it was chosen to be the setting for a few scenes of the Johnny Depp movie about the mobster John Dillinger called Public Enemies that was recently released), so we opted to stand in line rather than wait at the bar. This way, we were first upstairs for our "Jamboree Lunch" and got first pick of our seats. Seeing as how there were only two ways that Jack could get up to the second floor – stairs or elevator – we chose the table nearest both entrances. We went to go pick up our lunch – peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cookies, fruit snacks, and chips situated in a safari hat – and came back to our table which had a bunch of little animal toys on it: lion rulers, a finger puppet zebra, coloring pages, and a parachuting tiger (oh how tempting it was to let him loose over the railing to sail down into the lobby... but Jack was due to arrive, so we were on our best behavior). Once we saw that all of the kids at the event were going to be seated elsewhere, I scooped up all of the jungle paraphernalia and put it in my purse. We put on our safari hats and ate our PB & J – did I mention that this event was designed for kids? Had we known before we got there, we would have brought our kids, but it wasn't very well organized and so we didn't really realize it until we got there – oh well. All was

forgotten once Jack Hanna arrived!! If you don't know who Jack Hanna is, here is a brief synopsis: Jack Hanna is an animal guy, and he was the director of the now world famous Columbus Zoo from 1978-1992. In that time, he put that zoo on the map; it went from being a place that even locals didn't know existed to a world renowned animal facility, and attendance at the zoo increased by 400%! He now travels the world visiting endangered species, zoos, and making live show and tv show appearances (his monthly appearances on David Letterman's show are always entertaining!!), all in the name of bringing awareness to wildlife conservation.

So anyway, at the Jungle Jamboree lunch, Jack goes from table to table (preceded by a woman carrying a baby wallaby in a pouch and a man with a fox), and he comes to our table first!! He had limited time at each table of course, but he autographed a little picture of himself, and we did have time to tell him how we saw him at Sea World on our honeymoon in 1999. He asked if we liked animals, and my response went something like this: "Duh, huh huh huh". As much as I had been thinking about what to say to Jack, it happened to me again. When I finally met him, I was dumbfounded and couldn't think about the most important things to talk about in such a little time. No matter; we would be meeting him AGAIN later that same day!!

So after that, we went back downstairs to the merchandise table, and Hubby bought me Jack's new book (My Wild Life – it's kind of a re-write / update to my favorite book, Monkeys on the Interstate. But I didn't have this new book yet, and needless to say now that I have it, my reading of the Harry Potter series has taken a backseat!), and we waited for Jack to finish at the lunch tables upstairs. He came downstairs, there was just a few minutes wait, and then we met him AGAIN and he signed my new book, plus ALL of the books of his that I had brought along – and I had a huge purse full. We explained to him that he is our favorite celebrity ("Oh, I'm not a

celebrity!" he said.), and the nice guy behind us took this picture (note that Hubby still has on his safari hat!):



Not sure what to do with ourselves after our autograph session, we were SO tempted to get back in line. After all, Jack Hanna, our favorite ~~celebrity~~ animal conservation personality was sitting within 10 feet of us! But we wanted to give other people a chance to meet him, and I'm glad we chose to just stand there and gawk at him from the sidelines for 25 minutes rather than getting back in line – turns out that some people didn't get a chance to get his autograph since he was whisked away to get ready for the stage show. It just wouldn't have been fair for us to be in the line twice. He announced later that people who didn't get a chance to get his autograph could just email his website and an autographed pic would be sent out. No offense, Jack, but that's just not the same as meeting you in person! I am SO thankful that we got to meet him, and he is even more humble and down-to-earth than he seems on tv!!

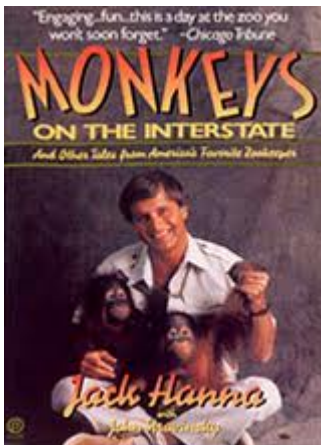
Well, this blog post got lengthy, and I haven't even talked about the stage show yet, so I think I will cut this into multiple posts as my little guy is finished with his 'quiet time'. Unfortunately for me (and my ever-growing list of housework), my 2-year-old has outgrown his naps so I don't have nearly as much free time during the day as I need to get everything done. So you'll have to wait until my next post (or two or three) to read about the actual Jack Hanna stage

show (best show I've EVER seen!!!) and the other stuff we crammed into our jam-packed super-fun Illinois weekend. Until then...

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## Jack Hanna!!!

While my girls are counting down the days until they get to go to their Grandma's house, I am counting the days until I get to see a LIVE JACK HANNA SHOW!!! Don't get me wrong, I'm really excited to see family too, but I've been waiting to see a live Jack Hanna show for over a decade!!!



I've had the show tickets in the car for about two weeks now, since I was so sure that I'd forget them. I've already packed my glasses too, so I can actually see Jack and the animals from my seat. And I've been "cramming" all week – trying to quickly re-read my favorite book, Jack Hanna's *Monkeys on the Interstate*. If all goes well, I should be finished with it by Saturday when I see Jack. Because we have tickets for a pre-show event called a Jamboree Lunch, I'm hoping for maybe an autograph or even an opportunity to chat with Mr. Hanna! I know it's a shot in the dark, but I've made a mental list of things I'd bring up just in case; many of them are from the *Monkeys* book. Even if I don't get an opportunity to talk to

Mr. Hanna, I am ecstatic just to be able to see his show!!! I really enjoy his appearances on Letterman every month, and I'm beyond excited to see Mr. Hanna live!! Just in case, I'm bringing an array of my Hanna collection in case I get a chance to seek an autograph, but I'm not expecting it or anything – don't want to be disappointed. It would be nice, however, to replace our autographed Jack Hanna honeymoon memento. Now I have to tell that story...

When my husband and I took our honeymoon to Florida in 1999, we were driving from where we lived in Illinois to Florida (which is a very LONG drive... but for some reason, I cannot remember exactly what it was like to do that WITHOUT KIDS along...), and we were talking about all the things we would do. One of the things that came up was celebrities we would like to run into, and Jack Hanna was the only one we both decided we would really care about running into. Once in Florida, we visited Sea World, and we were going to go into the underwater viewing area for the dolphins, but it was roped off – “TV show taping in progress”. Just before we turned away to head to something else, a worker lifted the ropes, so in we went, and the crew was packing up the cameras, and THERE WAS JACK HANNA!!! And we were all alone since the area had just been closed off – no mob of fans to compete with. Ok, so maybe Jack Hanna isn't the type of celebrity to have fans mobbing him wherever he goes, but to me, he is an animal hero. His *Monkeys on the Interstate* book chronicles his creativity, his strength through adversity, and his triumphs (and failures!) he went through as he was building the once unheard of Columbus Zoo into the world famous, state-of-the-art zoo facility it is today – a fascinating read for anyone who loves animals, zoos, Jack Hanna, or who just likes funny stories!! Jack Hanna is a marketing and animal genius! But I digress – back to my story...

So we got to meet Jack Hanna, right there at Sea World. I was not expecting it, so I gummed up and let my husband do the

talking, and Jack whipped out an 8×10 glossy picture and autographed it, putting our names on it and everything. Unfortunately, this picture was one of a few irreplaceable items that were entrusted to so-called “friends” during a move we had, never to be seen again... but that’s another story and nothing I want to dwell upon now.

So yeah, IF I actually get to talk to Jack again this time, I have my list of things I want to talk about... though it’s quite lengthy, and my brain will be swimming with basically EVERYTHING from the *Monkeys on the Interstate* book, as well as things I want to know about starting my own zoo – hey, that shouldn’t come as a big surprise to any of my readers, so lift your dropped jaw. Those of you who know me realize that I have a pretty good start on one already, don’t you? ☐



*This is Jack at one of his Letterman appearances. Each of his appearances on Letterman has moments of hilarity as Jack tries so hard to get in his animal facts while Letterman is busy making jokes and heckling him. After decades of monthly appearances, the two have built a relationship of sorts, and Jack now brings animals that sometimes shock, awe, and even scare Letterman!! Never a dull moment when Jack’s around...*

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# Busiest Weekend EVER! Part Two

*(continued from a previous blog post)*

So here's a recap of Sunday – church, brunch, Hannah Montana movie – and that is where I left off.

So we get to the Hannah Montana movie, and of course our 9-month-old son wakes up from his nap just in time for the movie (couldn't be awake to play at church, couldn't be awake to indulge in brunch, alas – that's always the way when you have kids – they sleep thru everything good, and I swear it's a rule – they always wake when the irony is thick!) But, because the Hannah Montana movie is a musical, our 3 youngest were kept too busy to perform their usual awful antics at the movie theater. It was a girly movie, especially with a double love story plot, but our little boy is only 9-months-old, so he didn't notice the girlishness. Instead he loved the musical interludes, and he clapped to each one enthusiastically. For some reason, and I've written about this before, the movie theater turns our normally sweet 2-year-old into a little stripper. Luckily, by the time the idea to take her clothes off occurred to her today, it was near the end of the movie, so she only got as far as taking off her socks and shoes – although she did make sure to note (yell) while doing so, “Don't look at me – I take clothes off!” Ok, Disney, if you don't want people looking, why are you taking your clothes off? Such is the logic of a 2-year-old, I guess.

We had no major spills this time ( I'm referring to our last experience when we saw Monsters Vs. Aliens and we somehow dumped an entire soft drink into the lady's purse who was sitting behind us – major oops!), and today our baby was on his best behavior as well because of all the music in the movie – something that I think saved us as far as our 3

youngest kids' behavior at the movies today. As for the movie itself, I enjoyed it more than I did Monsters Vs. Aliens, probably because I actually got to watch this one. But an extra nice surprise for me was the country music add-ins – surprise performances from Taylor Swift and my favorite group, Rascal Flatts. They sang one of their best songs acoustically as if they were relatives just sitting around jamming at a family get-together (can this be MY family get-together?), and it was thoroughly enjoyable. Miley Cyrus even showed her country roots in a song which attempts to revive line-dancing; I guess kids these days (now I sound like I'm 80 – GREAT, when did THAT happen?!?) have a dance they do to this song, but whatever, I kind of liked the song. Overall, I truly enjoyed the country theme that was abundant in this movie – groovin' country music, gorgeous farm fields, cowboys ropin' horses... what's not to like? There was also a surprise (for me) appearance by Jan Levinson Gould from the tv show, The Office. Of course in this movie, she wasn't Jan – she was some southern belle who played Miley's dad's love interest – almost as far away from Jan as one could be, but I still enjoyed the Office reference. Also, keep in mind that this is a Disney film, so there are LOTS of prat-fallish types of humor, as well as recurring movie themes. For example, 'lobster trouble' (ala Splash, circa 1984), 'switching identities for different dinner dates' (ala Mrs. Doubtfire, circa 1993), 'major celebrity comes in to save a town' (ala Wayne's World 2, circa 1993 or ala Mystery, Alaska circa 1999), it's always best to be yourself' (ala... wow, WAY TOO MANY TO MENTION – take your pick...)

So anyway, I have to (reluctantly) admit that I was pleasantly surprised with the Hannah Montana movie – plenty of stuff in this one for the parents as well as the tweens and even the stripping two-year-olds. But the movie wasn't as plot-less as I had hoped – in other words, we didn't get home until 2:55 – just 20 short minutes before we had to leave for a class we had signed up for through church. So for the next 20 minutes



we scrambled around – letting dogs out, repacking diaper bags, changing diapers, etc. We arrived at our class pretty much on time, though a bit exhausted, thank you very much!

The class was great! We learned a lot about our church – their beliefs, their history, as well as their foundations for building a relationship with Christ – a very well-spent 3 hours. And we got to meet other couples at our table too – which is memorable for me because they were surprised to learn we had 4 kids – and I quote, “You don’t look old enough to have 4 kids!” NICE!

Following the class was a great dinner of homemade pasta provided by a local chef. Following the delicious dinner was a tour of the north campus of our church – we worship in the south campus, so it was nice to learn the ins and outs of the north campus – so awesome! Our oldest daughter was so excited to show us where her Sunday school was held, and their rooms for youth were VERY impressive! There was a room with a stage for youth productions, and it even had backstage areas, which is almost more than I can say for one of our community theater’s stages, haha! Also, there was a game room with multiple foosball tables and ‘carpet ball’ – something new to me, but a game I’d definitely like to try! One of the youth rooms had state-of-the-art stage lights and restaurant-style booths for kids to ‘hang out’ in... Overall, it was a fun evening, and I learned a lot. But, as became common for today, we had to rush from the church class in order to be home in time for the community theater’s play reading committee meeting and my much anticipated Cubs game. I was looking forward to this game for days. It was a long series (most are 3 game, some are 2 game, this one was 4 game) against the Cubs rival – the St. Louis Cardinals, with whom the Cubs are vying for first place. The game was at night, which is rare for a Sunday, so I was VERY excited about rounding out my weekend with such a game. But alas, the darn rain had its way, and the game was postponed. So only play

reading meeting to look forward to for me – at least I didn't have to rush the meeting and kick people too hard to leave my house since there was no Cub's game! And for once, I think we actually achieved a lot at the play reading committee meeting. Probably because of the fact that there were only 4 of us in attendance – but hey, maybe that 's what needs to be done in order to achieve something... too many people get in each others way, I guess. It will be interesting to see what the absent members think of the decisions the four of us made while they were absent – I hope the decisions stick!

In summary, a great, if extremely exhausting weekend. Come on now, would I have it any other way?

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## **Random Celebrity Death And The Sunshine State**

We are very fortunate to be able to visit the Orlando area in Florida (read: Disney World!) yearly, but during our past two visits, CNN has been overrun with news of unexpected and shocking celebrity deaths. In February 2007 during our visit, the breaking news was of model/actress Anna Nicole Smith's early demise. It was widely speculated that she was on drugs, but her death was still very surprising especially considering her 20-year-old son, Daniel Smith's shocking death just 3 months earlier.

During our latest outing to the Sunshine State in late January of this year, it was Heath Ledger's accidental overdose that ruled the news. At the time, I have to admit that I didn't know exactly who he was or what movies he was in, but I did recognize what a big name he had in show business. His death

took everyone by surprise; so much so, that the event completely dominated the news while we were in Florida. With gas prices the way they are, I don't know if we'll make it back to Orlando this October as planned; we might have to push it off until early next year in January or February or even wait until the kids are older altogether... But if we do decide to go, I'll put out the word to watch out for a random celebrity's unexpected passing...