

Ahh... A Relaxing Baseball Game And A... LOSS?!?

I had a really stressful day yesterday. The kids went completely crazy at night – was it a full moon? I didn't check. Even if that was the case, other little things kept going wrong also. Little things – things that really shouldn't matter. Except that when those little things are added up, they equal *one bad day*. So I thought I could beat my stress by looking forward to watching some BASEBALL on TV. Yes, that's right, I said BASEBALL on TV! And it's only early March – we haven't even changed the clocks yet!

I just happened to look on tvguide.com yesterday to see if I could look forward to a new episode of Lost, and I noticed that my favorite baseball team, the Chicago Cubs, were set to play their cross-town rivals, the Chicago White Sox and it was going to actually be on tv in our little corner of NW Ohio! Even though it's only spring training, that brightened my mood considerably since it's been MONTHS since I've gotten to watch baseball. With the way my day was going, I was sure something would go wrong – the tvguide had made a mistake and we didn't get it, Vegas (where the game was played) would disappear into a sinkhole, something like that. But 10:00 finally rolled around, and the game was on! AND, the teams were putting in their starters rather than their scrub players, which meant real, actual baseball to watch! So I felt better; I relaxed and sat down to watch the game, and of course, that's when my two middle children (the trouble-makers of the brood these days) decided to start fighting. So it wasn't peaceful, but I did get to watch the game. And it was a good game – the Cubs were down, but then they tied it up, but of course the Sox came back to win. A disappointing outcome for such an otherwise great game. But the good news is, it was only spring training so who cares who won!

After the game I left WGN on the tv, and I was treated to an episode of the old tv show Alf. Remember Alf? It was a sitcom from the 80's about a family who discovers an Alien Life Form (ALF), and takes him in to live with them. Alf is a furry wise-cracking puppet with an affinity for cats (to eat!), and the family must keep him secret so he doesn't get taken away. Alf was a huge fad in the 80's; there were toys, lunchboxes, a cartoon spinoff, you name it. After the Alf episode, on came the Steve Wilkos show (he's the former bodyguard from the Jerry Springer show who now has his own trashy talk show – I wrote about this in a previous post, probably because of my disbelief that they would actually give this guy air time). And that was my cue to hit the sack for my lovely 4½ hours sleep. So far, today has been a little better, although our trouble-making 4-year-old is at school. Tonight I'm looking forward to a brand spankin' new Office episode – YIPPEE! But first I have to get through a few boring meetings. Sure hope I don't doze; I am awfully tired!

Twins – Years Apart

Everyone says it. Our family, friends and acquaintances are in agreement – our two middle children look just like each other. They could pass for twins, except for the fact that Sammie is almost 5 and Disney is 2½ – so twins years apart, you might say. Don't believe me? Nothing like photographic evidence...



Busy, busy



The last day or so has been a bit busy. Part of it was me wasting time on Hamsterball, a clone of the 80's hit arcade game Marble Madness, and part was preparations for church this weekend. I have been wasting a *lot* of time on Hamsterball. Those who remember [Marble Madness](#) will remember that the game uses a trackball. The player would madly roll that trackball to guide his or her marble downhill (in one case *uphill!*) to the exit, encountering many an obstacle on the way down. Two players could even play at the same time, adding to the madness. Hamsterball plays a great tribute to this game, but it looks like the two player game is limited to either a one-on-one battle to knock the other off a platform, or playing just one board at a time instead of an entire tournament. Actually, the battle part can be up to four players- one-on-one-on-one-on-one, as it were. Instead of a marble, the wonder of current technology allowed the programmers to turn it into a hamster ball, with the hamster dutifully running in the ball as it moves. You can play in resolutions of 640×480 up to 1280×1024, in a window or fullscreen. Unfortunately,

fullscreen for me means the game is stretched to fill my widescreen display making the ball look flat. When windowed, the game displays a correct aspect ratio fortunately. In lieu of a trackball, I have tried to play this game using a mouse, the track-pad on this oversized laptop, and an analog Saitek game controller. The game controller works the best for my purposes, but I still would like to get an arcade-style trackball at some point. I missed out on buying one for \$50 back when I could afford one. The game itself starts with ideas from Marble Madness and takes off from there. Besides the classic enemies like an enemy ball and disappearing floors, you will encounter fans, saws, giant hammers and mousetraps, and much more. Remember the world on Marble Madness where your marble goes up ramps instead of down? Well, add sideways to this game in a world where the gravity changes depending on where your ball is on the screen. Here are some pictures from the game (click for larger size). You can also find a bunch of videos on [Youtube](#):



The business with church involved the 4th/5th grade ministry and children's drama. I had a script to finish memorizing for the rehearsal which started at 3:30. In addition, for the review game, Jeopardy, for 4th/5th grade I made some cards to draw for the categories and point values. Sure, we could have let the students pick for themselves, but when there are 30-50 kids in the room, with half of them (two teams) having to agree that would have caused the game to drag. One of the pastors used a die to decide in the past, but where's the fun in that when we could have the kids draw from a box cool-looking cards instead? On top of that it was rewards weekend. As such I had to call about ten kids in my small groups to remind them to bring their reward sheets with them. Most of them did, but a couple still forgot or couldn't find them.

An odd thing happened this weekend. There was a guest pastor

from California, and for some reason on Saturday night he thought the service was two hours (it's really $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours) and so we were wondering in kids ministry what was going on when 6:45 rolled around, then 6:50 and the parents still weren't there to pick up the kids. I learned the next day of what happened. The pastor was corrected and had to shorten his message by a half-hour otherwise chaos would have ensued between the two morning services as people for the second service arrived to a full parking lot because the first service hadn't left yet ☹️. In the end, everything worked out well. The review game was only its usual chaos, the drama went well- if not always perfect- for the three services, and the kids were too fully engaged in the room games Saturday night to care that their parents hadn't arrived yet (I do feel for the other classrooms though that didn't have carpetball, four-square, and air hockey).

Another Wonderful Zoo Visit

We went to the Toledo Zoo again last weekend (it was our second weekend to visit the zoo in a row; we visited on Feb 7 and 15). Almost a week has passed since our last visit, but I had other blog posts lined up and ready to go, so that's why I'm first writing about it now.

Having a zoo membership is awesome because you get to visit the zoo whenever you have free time, and you don't have to worry about seeing EVERYTHING on EVERY visit since you know you'll be back soon. The last few times we've gone, we parked in the back parking lot and stay on that side of the zoo, which cuts the amount of walking considerably – a great option for winter months since this parking lot is free in the off-season and very close to the rear zoo entrance. With 4 small

children, this is the way that works best for us, even though it means skipping the other side of the zoo which includes the polar bears, seals, wolves, and giraffes. No matter, we still see plenty, and now we have a whole half a zoo to see sometime if we go without the kids or are feeling extra ambitious.

Every zoo visit is different, which is one of the things I love about going. The animals are always doing different things, and my favorite exhibits vary with each visit. Here are the highlights from last Sunday's visit:

Lions – The Toledo Zoo has white lions. White lions are rare and the result of a recessive gene similar to the gene of white tigers. The Toledo Zoo has 3 white lion brothers on loan from Siegfried and Roy, the famous Las Vegas magicians. Normally during our zoo visits, the lions are sleeping and up on a ledge far from the viewing glass, but last Sunday they were walking around, and one of them even walked right up against the viewing glass! I've seen lions up close before, but not for a long time and never the gorgeous white lion until last week.

Hippos – The hippos are in their indoor enclosure for the winter, and even though their room seems somewhat cramped, the animals don't seem unhappy, and it's very cool to see these HUGE animals up close. It's amazing to me that their small pool must get very deep very fast in order to allow the animal to be completely submerged. As we watched, the hippo was bobbing for apples, and he caught his apple and swallowed it whole. This hippo was so large that the apple in his mouth looked about as big as a grape would look in the mouth of a human being. And this provided an extreme close-up of his humongous teeth!

Gorillas – When we got to the gorilla exhibit, it was empty. But a friendly zookeeper told us to stick around for about 10 minutes for gorilla feeding time. We then got to watch as the keepers threw greens, fruit, and straw all around the

enclosure; taking care to place some on the various ledges and hide some within crevices of the exhibit (seriously, am I too old to embark on this as a career?!? I'm afraid so...). Then they let the gorillas back in, and it was a frenzy. Well, an orderly frenzy – there was no pushing nor shoving; just some excited gorillas foraging in their exhibit. They quickly found all the hidden surprises, and we laughed as one of the females hoarded as much lettuce as she could carry and brought it up to a high ledge to enjoy it all by herself.

Elephants – The elephants were indoors, and the now 6-year-old baby Louie was using his trunk to eat jello off the floor. I really enjoy watching elephants use their trunks; it's fascinating to me how dexterous they are – almost like they have 2 fingers on the end. But we've watched Louie grow up ever since we've been coming to this zoo when he was just a year or two old, and now he's getting pretty big! Last time we were at the zoo, he was trying to get down a step so he could get to the water, and he ended up going backwards down the step – it was so cute!

So great day, awesome fun as always! Like I said, every visit is different, and I am never disappointed! I am a zoo-addict!

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!

I Know Who To Blame For This Economy

WAL-MART! I can find many ways to blame Wal-Mart for the way the economy is tanking. Time for my latest beef about the place. We went over there Friday morning because my husband didn't have to work until after lunch, and we need an oil change. So we thought we'd get the oil change done together this time, which made me really happy because normally it's just me and my two children (ages 2 and 7 mos.) who have to kill around 2 hours there every 3 months (or sometimes even more frequently). If you're thinking that spending 2 hours at Wal-Mart with 2 little kids while trying not to spend a lot of money is both exhausting and frustrating, you aren't very far off the mark. So anyway, Friday I thought I had company for the oil change, but even so, who wants to spend hours at Wal-Mart? When we pulled up, I was pleasantly surprised to see that there weren't any cars waiting, so I thought we might actually be out of there in under an hour – WRONG! The wait time they quoted us was an hour and a half! But we needed the oil change and were kind of trying to kill time until the area restaurants would start serving lunch, so we decided to go for it, especially since they've opened an H & R Block in the Wal-Mart for tax season. Taxes and an oil change – kill two birds with one stone, or so we thought... We get to the other side of the store where the makeshift H & R Block is, and we find out it's not open until 1pm. So we went back to the Automotive Department to sign in our car anyway, and that's when we discover that an oil change at Wal-Mart is now \$30! That is a \$7.50 increase in price over the last 3 months! So no taxes to get done + expensive oil change + long wait = forget it! And I will add the fact that Wal-Mart sucks at oil changes.

Almost every time I'd come home with the car, it would act funny or something else would be wrong with it. Once they forgot to put the air filter back in, several times they didn't replace the wiper fluid when it was checked off on the to-do list, and a few times I had to go back and have them re-vacuum the interior of the car because they said they did it but clearly had not. Those were the days when oil changes were still so reasonable in price that we got the full monty of services, including the vacuuming and the refilling of fluids – not anymore!

We called other places around town, and we found that Wal-Mart is now the most expensive AND takes the longest. But at the other places you needed an appointment, so we'll have to wait until next week – no problem if I don't have to go back to Wal-Mart! Plus I'd rather support the little guy anyway (ever hear the country music song "Little Man" by Alan Jackson? It's a good one and I highly recommend listening to it if you're frustrated about Wal-Mart's world take-over). And that brings me to why I'm blaming Wal-Mart for the awful economy...

They're putting all the little guys out of business, so there go the jobs and the competition in the retail world that was keeping product and services prices reasonable. Wal-Mart sets the pricing trends, unfortunately. Mark my words, as soon as the little guys in town get wind that Wal-Mart upped their oil change prices, they will follow suit and you won't be able to touch an oil change for under \$30. And worse yet, I read in the newspaper just yesterday that Wal-Mart is the only retail place that posted profits for January. In fact, they're doing even better than Wall Street predicted for them, which in this economy, makes them stand alone in that respect.

The state of our economy is so bad right now that I suppose it's not logical to blame just one entity. But moaning about Walmart is a good venting tool, and they p*ss me off!

Sick Of Being Sick

The past week and a half in our house has been awful. It all came to a head last Friday when our two-year-old got sick in the car. Last weekend, when she wasn't sleeping, she was throwing up or in the words of Chandler, played by Matthew Perry on the tv show Friends, "visiting a town a little south of throwing up...". Later in the weekend, her baby brother was afflicted with the same illness, and now we had huge messes x2. Big sister Sammie got it later in the week, but luckily, the little ones started feeling better. Add in a snow day and a couple of weather delays, and our house was chaos for what seemed like forever. On top of everything, I had some sort of extreme fatigue. I was so worried about it that I even made a doctor's appointment and went in, where the doctor ran some blood tests and even gave me a neck xray since I had a strange achiness accompanying the fatigue. I guess it didn't occur to me that I could have the same virus that struck down the kids, mainly because I didn't have the same (disgusting) symptoms they had, but I did look up some stuff on the internet in an attempt to ~~scare~~ diagnose myself. The good news is, my xrays and blood tests came back normal (well, I'm actually still waiting on one of the tests, but it's Friday and the nurses are out to lunch and won't be back until Monday afternoon – what is that? Can I have a job like that?), but the tests that did come back show that there is nothing wrong with my thyroid or my iron levels, both of which I thought were possibilities. So that's good... I guess. If there was something wrong with my body chemically, we'd be able to fix it, and then I'd have the energy I need to keep up with my 4 little kids. Now that most things came back normal, I don't know where to start to feel better... Although I do feel much better today, but still no where near normal, and that makes

me think it might be the illness my kids had after all. But it was a bizarrely lengthy version of the stomach flu, and it will take us weeks (at least!) to catch up on all the work that didn't get done in the week and a half of illness, sigh.

My husband had to take off from some of his work so he could watch the kids while I rested, and especially with all the laundry we've had to do around here, Mt. Washmore is once again threatening to take over the second floor of our house. All this catching up, and I'm still exhausted... My husband seems to think I have sleep apnea, mostly because I snore often and loudly and I'm always needing more sleep. I forgot to bring this up to the doctor, but if I ever get ahold of her and that last test comes back normal, maybe we can go from there... I do seem to need an awful lot of sleep to function. Well, anyway, that's my story – sorry if I grossed anyone out (especially body-function-joke-hater Derek), but I thought people should know where I've been for the last two weeks. At least the kids are feeling better – it was beyond sad to see them crabby, lethargic and not able to keep anything down... Is it time for summer yet?!?

You've got the what?

I now have permission to write this blog. The news has been spreading and most of the people that needed to know, know. So with this post we will all be more knowledgeable.

Last weekend, my oldest left a message on my cell phone for me to call her. Her news was that she had three bars. Being bit dense, I thought 5 bars was good for cell phones. She was talking about different bars. Apparently my oldest is expecting her first child. So I have a grandchild coming into

the world. Great news for this grandfather. I'm rather looking forward to being able to spoil a grandchild within easy visiting distance.

Those who know me, know that my two oldest daughters both have step-children. As far as I'm concerned these are my grandkids too. Unfortunately, I do not get to visit with them as often as I would like. Two of these children are many miles away, and I don't have the time or cash to be able to take off at the drop of a hat to visit. I surely wish I was able to, but right now I can't. My other granddaughter doesn't get to visit very often, situation is complex, as often happens. So now I will have a grandchild only 1 hour away. Great for the child, but I'm not sure how the parents will react. Hee! Hee!

Now for the fun part. My future grand child already has a nickname. When darling daughter was calling people to let them know about the future happenings, she called her grandparents. They were involved in this or that, and wondered if my daughter could call back. My daughter, with her usual humor, responded: "Sure, I've got 9 months." Her grandmother heard: "Sure, I've got the mumps." It apparently took a bit of explaining to get across the wording of "9 Months". Grandma kept hearing mumps. I really would have liked to be a fly on the wall for that conversation. Anyway, my future grandchild's current nickname is Mumps.

It should be a fun time in NW Ohio for the next few months, or even years.

Toy Culling

A few weeks ago, our kids were chronically misbehaving. Our oldest, a tween, was sassing back and saying "no" too much,

her younger sister (the “spirited” one) was throwing lots of tantrums and trying to cause trouble with her sisters, and our youngest daughter was constantly upset and insecure about the continuous chaos in the house. Desperate times call for desperate measures, so one day while the oldest kids were at school and the younger ones were sleeping, my husband took off work for an afternoon of “toy culling”. This is a drastic discipline measure we only use in emergency situations. It is time-consuming and intensive labor for the parents, but well worth it, at least in our house.

Toy culling consists of us going into the girls’ room (the three oldest girls share one big room, and our baby boy isn’t yet old enough to cause trouble) and taking out every toy. We leave the tv, computer with educational games, books, and the clothes and board games in the closet. Everything else goes – dressup clothes, doll clothes, dolls, stuffed animals, all the little miscellaneous toys that can really junk up a child’s room quickly, etc. If you have lots of time, you can sort it all by what you want to keep and organize the rest, but we are very busy people and so we just took all their junk and put it in our son’s room for now. He’s a baby who wakes in the night so he’s still in our room. When it’s time to move him into his room, we’ll have to clean it out obviously, but for now it was a means to an end of the horrible behavior of the girls. We leave the board games, and they know that they take one out and put it away when they’re done, just like the books that are left. If the rules aren’t followed, anything that’s left on the floor in subsequent days gets culled. You need to check their room everyday, and it’s **imperitive** that you follow through with rule-enforcing. And for some reason, this process really works. I don’t know what it is... Perhaps a feng shui effect where the much more pleasant ambience of the room and the *mucho* extra space is what leads to the kids being in better moods and hence, less trouble and more obedient. It could be the fact that there are less toys over which to fight. Maybe they’re happier not having it constantly hanging

over their heads that they're going to have to clean their room. But I don't care what the reason is, the toy culling has worked wonderfully the 3-5 times we've had to set aside a chunk of time to do it. My kids are now putting their dirty laundry in the hampers that are provided, and their trash is going into garbage cans. Also, their room is staying clean, and I don't have to worry about it staying that way because they don't have anything with which to mess it up! And, as the behavior improves, they can earn their toys back – you don't have to spend money to get them any special reward PLUS the kids feel senses of accomplishment = WIN/WIN. Toy culling proves that less is more, and it helps put a damper on the sense of entitlement that can cloud the good attitude of even a generally well-behaved child.

I think I first read about the method in a parenting column in the newspaper. I'm not sure which expert gets the credit, but I do know that I highly recommend toy culling! And oh yes, early December is a perfect time to do this – makes room for the burst of new things they might receive for the holidays!

Vacation Diary – Chapter Four

Wednesday, October 22 – Breakfast at Golden Corral – best omlette I've had in a long time. Then it was off to the Magic Kingdom where our group got separated. It was ironic because they make an announcement on the monorail on the way over to the Magic Kingdom about picking a meeting place in case your party gets separated, and during that announcement, I had a feeling we should probably do that. We ended up finding everyone but not at the meeting place we had designated. The Monsters Inc. show is funny as always, and my husband was chosen *again* to participate, this time playing "Sully". We

skipped Space Mountain this time around because the line was long and by the time we remembered to get fast passes, we were ready to leave Tomorrowland. I also skipped one of my favorites, Peter Pan's Flight, but it was well worth it to get my husband a wheelchair so he could get off his extremely painful infected toe. Besides, the girls still got to ride it with our friend, Jamiahsh. Splash Mountain was fun, although the recent updates the ride incurred saw the song on it changed from the extremely catchy "Zippidy Doo-Dah" to something else I don't even remember. That's 0/2 for me liking the rides they've updated this trip, if you're keeping track.

And this is the second Florida trip where both my husband and I saw a strange and unidentified creature. We're not crazy, but both times we both saw the same things. This time, it was a black figure running across the road which was actually a bridge over another road. When it got to the edge of the bridge, the black shape just kept going – which means it was airborne. I didn't see it "running" really; to me it was a black oval traveling across the road – I couldn't make out any legs. My husband, who has better eyesight than I, saw something running and then flying. Either way, none of this describes any animal I'm familiar with, especially one who is native to the United States. And since I'm on the subject, I will describe our first unidentified creature encounter. It was a few years ago on our way down to Florida, somewhere in the wilderness of Georgia in the middle of the night. I saw something sitting by the side of the road, and then it opened and flapped a LARGE pair of wings and flew a short distance upwards onto a low branch in a tree. It's wingspan was huge – a diameter of a full grown man at least, 6 feet or more. This sighting was witnessed by my husband also, and we call it "Batman". I've looked up various birds and the largest I've found is a condor, but this creature seemed even larger and its body was bigger and shaped less like a bird's body. Mysteries as yet unsolved...

Well, anyway, talking about the strange creature on Wednesday night disoriented us, and after we got out of Disney World's huge tangle of roads, we went to the Boston Lobster Feast where at least one kid stayed passed out. Because we had 3 of the 4 kids asleep by the time we got back to the condo, Chris and I decided to take our night out that had been scheduled (and cancelled due to kid neediness) for the previous two nights. We went over to the Fun Spot, a newer amusement park next to Old Town. We went on an extreme ride – check this out:



It actually was much more mild than it looks – and no, that's not us in the picture. The ride was kind of lame, really... Conversely, two of the 4 go-cart tracks at Fun Spot are wicked, simply put. And I'm not exaggerating when I say that someone might be killed on those tracks. Unfortunately, I had to witness a little girl speed out of control and hit the wall at a high rate of speed. I think she was alright; she was conscious at least, but she was very scared, and it was terrifying to witness. The one track starts by winding up a ramp, and then when you're at the top, the track drops off so suddenly that I'm sure a cart could get some air if one was on a suicide mission and wanted to try it. So your cart picks up speed down this steep hill, and before the track even levels out, there's a hairpin turn – looks like you're driving in a bowl – followed by another downward slope. I can't believe they let kids drive the course, and I shudder to think what careless, invincible (so they think) teenage boys would do with a go-cart on that track – especially a whole pack of them driving it together. But for us adults, it was lots of fun, although I prefer something much more mild in a go-cart – the things have no padding! Another course they had there was very small but it had a lot of sharp turns, and it reminded me of a live version of Mario Kart – without the fake gift boxes and shell weapons, of course ☐

Here is a picture of crazy go-cart course – it doesn't even show the "32 degree banked bowl", just the "shear drop":

