

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. ☐

I Would SO Try This!!

In past summers, Hubby and I have been lucky enough to have all 4 kids watched by Grandma for an entire week. This gave us time for some kid-free fun together with just us, as well as time to catch up on necessities like work and sleep. For the past two summers, we've made a trek down to Cincinnati for some FUN. We've been going to [King's Island](#), an amusement park in the suburb of Mason. Their VIP tours are quite reasonable, considering all the benefits you get (your own personal park guide for the day, all you can eat for lunch, and front of the line ride access, to name just a few!). We've been making a weekend of it, going to the world-class Cincy Zoo one day, followed by a VIP tour at King's Island the next.

I was on their site today, and I saw this cute little teaser video starring Don Helbig, the public relations manager at King's Island: the same guy who meets us by the awesome 5-minute long wooden coaster The Beast for our backstage tour, which is also included in the VIP ticket. Having ridden King's Island's wooden coaster The Racer over a whopping 12,000 times and holding the Guinness record for coaster riding, Don is fascinating to talk to. He made this video to unveil King's Island's new 2011 attraction – or so I thought.

So after seeing the video, I did a bit of internet searching, and it didn't take me long to find the attraction being unveiled on March 18; here is [your sneak peak](#):



The Windseeker is a swing ride, but it's going to suspend riders 301 feet above the ground, swinging at speeds over 30 mph!! Even though I have not been enjoying the height of the coasters in the past few years, I would try this!! Thing is, we won't be making it to King's Island this summer because buying a ticket to enter the park would be a waste of money for me this year – I am due with my 5th child in the fall! I'm not too broken up about missing the new ride or any of my old favorites; after all, I'd rather have a baby than a trip to King's Island a million times over, but for the record, I would try this ride!!

We're going to have to find something equally fun and pregnant-lady-in-the-summer-friendly to do this summer, but it might be a challenge – everything I can think of involves being outdoors and also lots of walking. Not only that, but since there are now 4 kids, Grandma wants to split their vacations with her into shifts during the Grandma week, meaning Hubby and I are down to zero kidless days. Oh well, there is plenty of time for that in about 20 years, right?!?

Some Added Spring In His Step

Sometime ago, I blogged about the famous and infamous celebrities who have gone through the seemingly revolving casting door of the musical [Chicago](#). Well, you can add one more: sleaze television king Jerry Springer. This month, the lawyer-turned Cincinnati mayor-turned talk show host-turned Dancing with the Stars (yes?) contestant wrapped his six week stint on the London West End as ethically elastic lawyer Billy Flynn. I suppose the acting would not be a far stretch from his days as a real lawyer and questionable politician. He is well known for his flamboyant, quick talking, flim flam personality. However, singing? Never had the pleasure of hearing him so I can't judge (let me see if he has made the you tube rounds). Here he is performing ["All I Care About"](#) at a performance of selected songs at a Leicester Square park. You just have to forward past the opening "All That Jazz." Personally, I would rather watch the first number but that is not what this post is about.

Well at least he and David Hasselhoff have something else in common. Jer-eee was the host of America's Got Talent and the Hoff is one of the judges. And as some will recall, the Burger King aficionado played the roles of Jekyll and Hyde on Broadway. Wonder if ol' Dave is going to put on the tux. Springer says that he is going to be joining the Broadway cast until he returns to the Windy City for the talk show. However, the producers of the New York show have no knowledge of this.

VIPs For A Day (part one of more parts)

On Thursday, my husband's brilliant ability to find awesome entertainment deals on the internet paid off once again. He booked us a VIP tour at [King's Island \(click for a view of the rides and attractions!\)](#) near Cincinnati Ohio, and we spent the entire day at this awesome amusement park! The VIP tour included our own personal guide; a park employee who followed us around all day leading us up the exits of every ride so that we got to bypass the line and ride without waiting – *in the seat of our own choosing*. We also got to wear lanyards with VIP passes on them (think of the movie Wayne's World when Wayne and Garth get backstage passes to see Alice Cooper. They wear them around their necks and proudly display their lanyards, flashing them into the faces of nearly everyone they encounter, hilarious!) – and tempting to reenact, but there were some people in line who were upset that we got to board without waiting in line; I wouldn't want to rub it in. But I would recommend the VIP tour to anyone who wants to go to King's Island – it includes a guide (you can even make him do things, like hold your stuff and go on rides, haha!), no lines (sometimes a minimal 5 minute wait at the gate while the ride operators find a place to stick you in, not really an issue at all – there is plenty to watch for those 5 minutes), an all-you-can-eat buffet for lunch, unlimited fountain drinks throughout the day, ice cream, a backstage tour of The Beast (the longest wooden roller coaster in the world!), and 2 ride pictures. A great deal, especially if you want to sit through my following narrative to see if it's a place you'd want to visit:

The lady on the phone told us to get to the park at 8:30 am, so we were actually early and had to wait in a car line to get in. When we got to the park, we got shuffled around and had

to wait a bit more – it seems that this part of the tour could be tweaked a little bit. We didn't get our guide and get on rides until about 9:45. Still early (park opens to the general public at 10), but we had about an extra hour of doing nothing at the park (could have slept an hour longer!), so perhaps they should tweak this part of the tour to make it run more smoothly for the guest – everything else about the tour is really great though! So anyway, our guide comes to meet us, and we gave him our list of rides and follow him around the park. Actually, since it was before 10, only the park's brand new showcase ride and The Beast were open. So we began with the Diamondback – which I had named as the ride that scared me the most on the way over. But I loved it! It was so smooth and all those fast drops were so fun in the cool open air. The Beast was another story. I liked it, but it was very rattly and jerky. Going back on The Beast later in the day and sitting in the front row changed the experience for me, however, and we ended up riding it a lot! Once we discovered the front car of The Beast and I switched sides of the train with hubby, I enjoyed the ride immensely. It's a **4 minute, 50 second** ride through the forest on a wooden roller coaster at speeds of over 60 mph. The subtle sound of chirping birds accompanied by the naturalistic scents of the surrounding forest and the wooden tunnels where the coaster whizzes is indescribable. A comment on themeparkinsider.com says about The Beast, *"Running through the thick forest at 65 mph on an intense wooden coaster...about as close to riding a real beast as you can get. Classic ride that always delivers."* – I have to agree. They built another wooden coaster at King's Island called Son of the Beast, but it closed in June when people complained it was too rough. From the printed King's Island info, I learned that Son of the Beast was a *looping* wooden coaster – interesting. Oh well, maybe it'll open some day for me to try. But back to the backstage tour of The Beast – very cool. We watched some trains descend the first large drop which actually leads directly underground into a tunnel. We walked further into the forest (noticed

some long-gone riders' possessions along the way: broken sunglasses, coins, hats, etc. Didn't see any cell phones, but then again, we saw the lost cell phone display they have in the Diamondback area – a big clear box FULL of cell phones, ipods, Blackberries, PDAs, etc.), and we learned some interesting facts while watching riders fly past us – and boy, were they surprised to see us walking around back there in the forest!! As for the facts – the entire coaster was built from scratch on site; unlike many of today's coasters which are shipped into the parks in segments. The Beast was built around and including the existing rolling terrain of the Miami River valley in lower Ohio, and as I mentioned, it goes underground. It has speed monitors built into parts of the track, so if a train is going to fast, it will automatically break to slow itself down. I gratefully noticed this while riding, and it helped calm my concerns of flying off the track. This coaster goes so fast into those tunnels – WOW! For all these reasons and more, it's a coaster like NO other! Here's a pic – looks like something I'll have to try in the fall; the forest looks beautiful during peak season for color-changing leaves:



Ironically, the exact opposite thing happened with the Diamondback – I loved it the first time, and then I tried the front row which was absolutely terrifying! I won't be riding the front of the Diamondback again. Careening down that first 74° drop (!) practically face-down at over 80 mph with only a red thing between my legs to keep me from plummeting to the earth made me feel like I was going to die for sure.



And not in a good way, which is ironically enough sometimes the reason why lots of crazy people like to ride coasters. Being in the front seat on Diamondback makes it look like the track disappears beneath you, then before you know it, you're flying in the air getting lift out of your seat and you have nothing on either side nor in front of you – yikes! I've grown too old to feel invincible, so I put a cap on my thrill-seeking. I enjoy a good coaster, but I also have my limits. If you are a thrill-seeker roller coaster enthusiast who just can't get enough, try the front car on Diamondback! And a side note, the guy who gave us the behind the scenes tour of The Beast is the guy who thought of the name for Diamondback; it was an interesting experience to have something like that come up during a conversation.

I think I'll stop there for now... it was a big day, and I'd like to write up more and get more pictures up – and yes, I do have those free ride pictures we got of Chris and I on The Beast and Diamondback. Am I willing to post them on the internet? Maybe you'll have to read my other King's Island posts to find out!

Presidential In-Laws

In-laws have a bad stigma in our country, to say the least. From sayings like, “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your relatives” or “When you marry your spouse, you’re marrying her whole family” to classic TV shows which depict the dreaded mother-in-law as a horrible threat or consequence for a character’s bad behavior (The Honeymooner’s, Bewitched, The Flintstones, to name just a few), in-laws definitely have a bad rap. Scenes from these shows flooded my brain recently when I read the following article on cnn.com – seems even the leaders of the free world have had problematic situations with their mothers-in-law. The reason the article was published is because apparently Barrack Obama’s mother-in-law, wife Michelle’s mother Marian Robinson, might move with the new first family to Washington. So will Mr. Obama’s situation be comparative to poor Harry Truman, whose mother-in-law refused to call him anything but Mr. Truman? Or will it be more like Dwight Eisenhower, who got along famously with his mother-in-law – in a good way? In recognition of Inauguration Day, read the following article for some interesting historical lessons about the complex familial relationships formed as a result of the union of two people:

From cnn.com, by David Holzel

(Mental Floss) – President-Elect Obama’s mother-in-law will be moving to Washington with the first family, at least temporarily, his transition team has confirmed. Marian Robinson will be the latest in a line of presidential in-laws who, for good or ill, lived under the same roof as the president.

President Dwight Eisenhower and his mother-in-law, Elivera Doud, pose for pictures with some of the grandchildren.

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Here are four stories that confirm the old truism: While America can choose its president, the president can't choose his in-laws.

1. Ulysses S. Grant and 'The Colonel'

You would think that the Civil War was settled at Appomattox, and no question of its outcome would have been raised in the White House of Ulysses S. Grant, who, after all, was the general who won the war.

But you would be wrong, because living with Ulysses and Julia Grant was the president's father-in-law. Colonel Frederick Dent (his rank seems to have been self-selected) was an unreconstructed Confederate, a St. Louis businessman and slaveholder who, when his daughter Julia went to the Executive Mansion early in 1869, decided to relocate there as well.

The Colonel didn't hesitate to make himself at home. When his daughter received guests, he sat in a chair just behind her, offering anyone within earshot unsolicited advice. Political and business figures alike got a dose of the Colonel's mind as they waited to meet with President Grant.

When the president's father, Jesse Grant, came from Kentucky on one of his regular visits to Washington, the White House turned into a Civil War reenactment. According to "First Families: The Impact of the White House on Their Lives", by Bonnie Angelo, Jesse Grant preferred to stay in a hotel rather than sleep under the same roof as the Colonel.

And when the two old partisans found themselves unavoidably sitting around the same table in the White House, they avoided direct negotiations by using Julia and her young son, named for the president's father, as intermediaries, Betty Boyd Caroli writes in "First Ladies": "In the presence of the elder Grant, Frederick Dent would instruct Julia to 'take better care of that old gentleman [Jesse Grant]. He is feeble and deaf as a post and yet you permit him to wander all over

Washington alone.' And Grant replied [to his grandson and namesake], 'Did you hear him? I hope I shall not live to become as old and infirm as your Grandfather Dent.'"

The Colonel remained in the White House – irascible and unrepentant – until his death, at age 88, in 1873.

2. Harry S Truman and the Mother-in-Law from Heck

Harry Truman and Bess Wallace met as children. He was a farm boy; she was the well-heeled granddaughter of Independence, Missouri's Flour King. When they married in 1919, Truman was a struggling haberdasher, and Bess's mother, Madge Wallace, thought Bess had made a colossal social faux pas. Until she died in 1952, Madge Wallace never changed her mind about Harry Truman. Her Bess had married way below her station.

Madge had plenty of opportunities to let her son-in-law know it. The newlyweds moved into the Wallace mansion in Independence, and the three lived together under the same roof until the end of Madge's life.

When Harry Truman was elected senator, "Mother Wallace," as Truman judiciously called her, moved with her daughter and son-in-law to Washington. In the family's apartment, she shared a bedroom with the Trumans' daughter, Margaret. And when Truman became president, she moved with them into the White House, where she cast her cold eye on the new commander-in-chief.

"Why would Harry run against that nice Mr. Dewey?" she wondered aloud, as Truman was fighting for his political life in the 1948 presidential race, according to "First Mothers" by Bonnie Angelo. And when Truman fired Gen. Douglas MacArthur for insubordination, Mother Wallace was scandalized. "Imagine a captain from the National Guard [Truman] telling off a West Point general!"

In December 1952, shortly before Truman's term ended, Madge

Wallace died, at age 90. For the 33 years they lived together, she never called her son-in-law anything but "Mr. Truman" to his face.

3. Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Mother-in-Law of the Year

If Truman's story sounds like the set-up for a film noir, his successor's relationship with his mother-in-law might have been a Technicolor musical.

Elivera Mathilda Carlson Doud, Mamie Eisenhower's mother, was "a witty woman with a tart tongue," Time magazine wrote, and Dwight Eisenhower thought she was a hoot. "She refuted every mother-in-law joke ever made," Time wrote. There was no question that she would join her daughter and son-in-law in the White House.

Ike called her "Min," the name of a character in the Andy Gump comic strip. Ike and Min "constituted a mutual admiration society, and each took the other's part whenever a family disagreement would arise," said Eisenhower's son, John. The New York Times observed, "The president frequently looks around him sharply, and inquires, 'Where's Min?'"

Widowed shortly before Eisenhower became president, Min spent the winters in the White House and summers at her home in Denver. It was while visiting his mother-in-law's home that Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in 1955. Two years later, in failing health, Min returned permanently to Denver. She died in 1960, at age 82.

4. Benjamin Harrison and the Reverend Doctor

Benjamin Harrison's father-in-law, John Witherspoon Scott, bore a double title: "reverend doctor."

Scott was born in Pennsylvania in 1800, did post-graduate work at Yale and took a professorship in mathematics and science at Miami University, in Ohio. He was also a Presbyterian minister

and an outspoken abolitionist. The reverend doctor was rumored to have shielded runaway slaves in his home as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Whatever the truth, Miami University dismissed him for his anti-slavery beliefs.

He accepted a post at Farmer's College, a prep school in Cincinnati, where he became a mentor of a student named Benjamin Harrison. During his visits to the Scott home, Harrison became friendly with the reverend doctor's daughter, Caroline.

Young Harrison spent so many evenings at the Scotts' home that he got the nickname "the pious moonlight dude," according to "The Complete Book of the Presidents" by William A. DeGregorio. He and Caroline were married in 1853 at the bride's house. The reverend doctor officiated.

John Witherspoon Scott later became a clerk in the pension office of the interior department. He gave up the position when Harrison was elected president in 1888. A widower since 1876, Scott moved into the White House with his daughter and their family.

It was the president's custom to lead the family in a half-hour of Bible reading and prayer after breakfast, Anne Chieko Moore and Hester Anne Hale wrote in "Benjamin Harrison: Centennial President." When the president was absent, his father-in-law took his place.

Caroline Harrison died in October 1892, two weeks before her husband lost the presidential election. Her father died the next month, at age 92. An obituary described John Witherspoon Scott as "a man of wonderful physical vigor, tall, broad chested and well preserved mentally."