

The Irony...

First, in honor of Memorial Day, I'd like to begin with a special thanks to all of our vets – thank you for all your sacrifice, no matter how high the price you paid while serving our country.

My family had an action-packed super-fun weekend planned starting the Friday night before Memorial Day. It lived up to its expectations, but not quite in the way I expected. It began with a Friday night plan to go to the last home game (Fort Wayne Indiana is the closest) of the CIFL – arena football. But we got a call on Friday afternoon from the Memorial Coliseum saying that the game had been canceled due to the fact that the opponent's team – the Marion Mayhem – had folded on Wednesday. That's right, the team went out of business. And they didn't tell us ticket holders until two days later, which was the day of the event. And we had had so much fun at the first arena football game we attended that we had invited and planned for a large group of 11 to go with us this time... including some last minute emergency babysitter finagling when our regular one had to cancel days before. So anyway, I was not going to cancel on our new babysitter, so after much searching (there was NOTHING else going on in Fort Wayne Friday night!), we ending up finding a (cheap!) movie theater that still had a great movie playign though it's an old one for the theaters: Book of Eli. A fun time, though not quite as fun as arena football, and I can't help but feel that the entire league is going to fold also, so that's the end of that kind of fun, I guess... But it was just ironic that we had told everyone how fun it was, then I planned this big outing only to find out mere hours before that it was canceled! Ironic.

Saturday and Sunday saw mucha fiesta as our friend [Derek](#) was able to visit from Illinois, and I will save on the detail since I am EXHAUSTED. All 3 of the little kids have been in

challenging stages lately, and my mornings have been beginning at 6am; waking up to screaming and fighting between the middle two, which is constant and does not stop until well after 10pm. I was seriously considering going to bed at 9pm Tuesday night, but we got home around 8:30 and found that our daughter's rat had passed away. We knew it was coming; he had been sick for a while. But we had to find a "coffin" (dog biscuit box) and have a burial, no matter how late it was or how many mosquitoes there were. And of course it was the best rat we had, and the one that belonged to our most responsible, well-behaved daughter. Ironical.

But the weekend involved a super-fun game night, a really great graduation party, some go-carting, movies, and just good old-fashioned catching up with friends. Hopefully I can catch up on my sleep soon, and hopefully the kids won't drive me too crazy being home all day, every day – today is their last day of school. Thanks to those of you who helped to make the weekend awesome!!

RIP

BOBBY JACK

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Something New

We were looking for a family-friendly activity to do with our kids on Saturday. The zoo was out since we're chaperoning a Girl Scout field trip there next Saturday. Our original plan was to take our very furry and smelly dog to get groomed, but when we called around for prices, the quotes were much more than we wanted to spend on something that will just have to be done again in a few months.

So my husband searched around and found [this: Roller Derby](#). Do you remember Roller Derby? It was popular in the 70's and 80's, and there was a recent movie about it called [Whip It](#), which was also Drew Barrymore's directorial debut. We saw the movie not too long ago, and it was enjoyable, but now I'm going to have to watch it again after seeing the sport played live.

Roller Derby is a sport played on roller skates by women. I asked my husband why men don't play, and he said they'd get carried away with the aggressiveness and kill each other. I think there are some men's leagues, but they aren't professional like the women's league. So anyway, a basic game of Roller Derby has two periods separated by a halftime. Each period has several "jams". Basic game play consists of a pack of skaters skating around a circular track. There is one "jammer" on each team, and she is supposed to break through the other teams' pack of players, scoring a point for each opposing team member she passes. There's more to it, but those are the basics. The action is fast, the sport can be brutal, and fights occasionally break out. It's a lot of fun to watch!! Especially if you're brave enough to sit in the "suicide seats" where you sit on the floor next to the track. Our friends were brave enough to try, and they came out in one piece! If you are interested in watching a bout or maybe even trying out to be a Derby Girl, check out the website of the [WFTDA – Women's Flat Track Derby Association](#) – they have a list of teams so you can find one near you. Here is a video from their website explaining the very basics of Roller Derby:

It was a great time – fun for the whole family, and I highly recommend it as something different to do. Tickets are pretty cheap – we paid \$12 for each adult and \$7 for my oldest daughter – the rest of the kids (5 and younger) were free. For that, we got about 5 hours of entertainment. The atmosphere is family friendly (despite some of the dirty innuendos some of the players' names imply that would go right over most kids' heads), and there are clowns running around providing additional entertainment. At halftime, my kids got to go out in the arena and play a racing game with the clowns, and they also do skits and make free balloon animals. Each kid gets a little noise maker when they walk in the door, and they also have a Hokey Pokey time and do the bit where they throw beach balls around the audience. While it was family friendly, my little ones were bored at times (they didn't understand the sport) and our little guy, who is not even 2, kept us from watching much of the action with his shenanigans. The lady who was waiting for me to finish with the changing table in the bathroom said, "I'm never bringing her to something like this again!" as she pointed to her little girl who looked about my son's age. So you might want to prepare yourself with lots of snacks, activities, and candy if you bring your kids. The kids ended up having a lot of fun, mostly because of all the yummy concessions Dad bought them and the little toys they got to take home. Hubby and I are going to check out a bout sometime for date night without the kids though so we can actually get into it and watch the game. And hopefully, there will be closer scores with a little more excitement – we witnessed two blowouts. In the first game, the Fort Wayne SWAT team got creamed by a team from Rockford, IL (where we used to live, what a coincidence!), and we left the second game early since it was getting late and the score was Fort Wayne – 154, Dayton – 13. OUCH!!

Tri-State Weekend

We were all over the place this past weekend. I guess it was the nice weather... wait, it rained Saturday!

It started with game night on Friday night – my intentions were to take it easy and end somewhat early so we could rest up for a big day with the kids on Saturday. It didn't end up that way – we began the weekend by staying up too late! But it was a fun game night, kind of a different crowd, so it was interesting to mix it up a little. Our new friend brought presents for the kids to game night, and I can't express enough gratitude – she basically saved game night! Our will-be-5-yr-old-tomorrow Sammie was in a mood, and seeing the new friend (the presents didn't hurt either!) actually got her out of the mood she would have otherwise stayed in all night probably – thanks Mary!

Saturday we were going to take the kids to the Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek, Michigan. My husband and I (and Taylor in her fetal days) went there in '99, and we loved the zoo. We found out it was only about an hour and a half drive from here, so we decided to check it out. An hour and a half drive doesn't seem like a long time if there's no traffic and the kids are good! Besides, an hour and half drive home after a busy day can sometimes (if we're lucky) cinch the deal and put all 4 of them asleep *for the night*. Well, anyway, it was raining on Saturday. And we didn't want to take 4 kids through an unfamiliar zoo in the rain. So we ended up at Crazy Pinz in Fort Wayne, Indiana. It's a place where they have arcade games, bowling, mini-bowling, mini-golf and the kids' favorite, Ball-0-City – a giant play area with levels and tunnels and balls to shoot at each other. I was really happy when my husband pointed out the Chicago Cubs game

playing on the huge tv in the bar. So I stood over there and watched the Cubs wriggle out of a dicey situation – they had been winning 4-0 when all of a sudden, Houston scores 4 in the 9th and ties it up! They also had bases loaded, but the Cubs got out of it somehow and came back with a win in the bottom of a 9th! The bar at Crazy Pinz erupted in a cheer – Cubs fans everywhere! So we stayed there for awhile and then got home late but not too late for us to catch up on watching the season finales of our two favorite tv shows – Lost and The Office.

I guess I should save it for another post, so let's just say we were really happy with the finales of BOTH shows. Lost actually answered a lot of questions that were outstanding, and it can finally be seen how events are starting to come full circle for the characters. Something awesome occurred on the Office, well, it was alluded to anyway, but I think it was obvious what the next *development* is for the Pam and Jim characters. Ahem.

Sunday after church we decided to reclaim our Saturday plans and head up to Battle Creek to [Binder Park Zoo](#). Sunday was a gorgeous, picture-perfect day weather-wise, and it ended up being a great decision – it would not be fun to tour this zoo in the rain with 4 little kids. The zoo is mostly outdoor, and there is a bit of walking if you want to see the majority of the zoo. You climb aboard a (free) zoo tram that takes you 5 minutes into the wilderness, err Wild Africa as the zoo calls it. But whether it's the wilds of Michigan or the savannas of Africa, the view that awaits you when you arrive in Binder Park's Africa is breathtaking. Beyond the authentic-seeming African village is a wall, and beyond the wall:



Click the picture to see a larger version – those are zebras and Thomson's Gazelles grazing in the huge pasture. And a clutch of ostrich eggs (real?) on the edge of the exhibit (lower right middle of picture). The giraffes can go out there too, but they are usually over here:



where you can FEED them! It was a great day at a great zoo, and we even saw an animal I had never heard of – the Patagonian Mara. Fully grown they are about 35-40 lbs. (the one here at Binder Park is 9 mos. old and about half that), and they are rodents most closely related guinea pigs. At Binder Park, the keeper was in the cage with the mara, and she was jumping onto his leg and doing tricks for food – very cool. I didn't get the best picture; there was a tree in the way – again click for a larger pic, maybe you can actually see the mara:



The Binder Park Zoo also has a cute rabbit exhibit where the kids can crawl through a tunnel and end up “in” with the rabbits, a cool children’s zoo (housing the happiest Guinea pigs I’ve ever seen – the first time I’ve seen Guinea pigs that weren’t squealing with fright or freaking out), and a carousel, among other fun things. Here is my son on his first carousel ride:



And two of my 4 happy kids at the zoo:



And my other two riding a giant ant:



So... a great weekend, even if we were never home sweet home. I was going to share my pastor's story he told on Sunday, but this post is long enough, that will have to wait for another post! Until then...

Walking With Dinosaurs

In case you haven't heard of it, [Walking With Dinosaurs](#) is a traveling show that is based on the BBC documentary of the same name. It is in Fort Wayne, Indiana this week, which isn't too far from us. They've been advertising it heavily, and I've been meaning to check out ticket info, but I kept

forgetting. Thanks to our local paper who ran a story about it the other day, I was reminded about it just in time! Seems the tickets are QUITE costly! However, my computer-savvy husband went online and found a discount that saved us SO much money on tickets, but only if we went opening night... So, we dragged all the kids to Fort Wayne to see some dinosaurs on a school night. Let me say, it was SOOO worth it!

It's been a really long time since I was really excited about something that actually ended up measuring up to my expectations. I was really excited about this show; I thought it would be a good show, but I will say that it *EXCEEDED* my expectations! Not only was it visually stunning, It was a perfect show for the whole family. There were lifelike dinosaurs engaging in battles, flying, and scavenging... what's not to like?!? We have kids of all ages and bravery levels, and they were all entertained. Our 8-year-old and our 4-year-old did get a little nervous in the beginning, but their fear quickly turned to excitement and awe once the dinosaurs started appearing. Our 19-month-old LOVED everything about the show. She is getting to the age where it's hard for her to sit still, especially now that she can walk, but she watched every moment of this show, and clapped and laughed so hard that I was even distracted from the dinosaurs at times by my daughter's cuteness. I wasn't distracted too much though, cuz the dinosaurs were totally AWESOME! They were life-size and SO realistic looking, it was amazing. Our seats were great too – best in the house, front row center. These dinosaurs were even better looking than the ones in the movie [Jurassic Park](#)! Walking With Dinosaurs operates on a \$20 million dollar budget, and it shows!

I would venture to say that this is probably the best professional live show I have ever seen, and that includes musicals from Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Phantom of the Opera, Camelot, and Les Miserables to other shows like Monsters Inc. on Ice, Dragon Tales Live, and dinner

shows like Medieval Times, Arabian Nights, and Pirates Dinner Adventure in Orlando, Florida. This was fun for the whole family; probably even most fun for my husband and I! If the tickets weren't so pricey, I would definitely go back and see the show again – even with the \$20-30 it cost in gas money alone. My 4-year-old suffered from what I call “fundown” after the show – a feeling of disappointment when an event is over that is so intense for kids, they usually cry or throw tantrums. But I can't say I blame her. When I realized the show was ending, I had my own “fundown” when I realized there weren't going to be any more dinosaurs!

Totally awesome show – wait, that's not even the right word. It was more of an experience than a show. Even better than the dinosaur-themed rides at Disney World and Universal Studios. As we were leaving the coliseum, the rest of the audience seemed very pleased as well. Everyone was smiling and jabbering about the dinosaurs a mile a minute. They also had one actor – who was upstaged by the dinosaurs, of course! – and some other props and effects in the show that made it totally awesome. Also pretty impressive were the rows upon rows of trailers parked outside that carry the dinosaurs from venue to venue. I knew it would take a few semis to cart around all those dinosaurs, but there were probably at least 25 semis parked out there! It is understandable that all these lifesize dinosaurs would create such an entourage, since the Brachiosaurus alone was 36 feet tall and 56 feet from nose to tail.

If this live show experience is going to be anywhere near your hometown, I highly recommend that you do your best to get tickets. It is a perfect show for the young and old, dinosaur fans, skeptics, or even those who are indifferent to the world's history; I don't see how anyone could NOT enjoy Walking With Dinosaurs!