

# Florida 2011 – Trip Diary – Part 2

Sunday January 16 – We drove over to Congo River mini golf to try to feed the gators they have there, which never works out because it's usually too cold in January for the cold-blooded gators to care much about eating, and this time was no exception. But we spent a long time just watching the gators and their habitat-mate turtles climbing around and over each other, getting in and out of the water – kind of like a free little zoo exhibit. My kids are too little to enjoy or let us enjoy playing mini-golf, so we went to Sizzler for an all-you-can eat lunch buffet. We spent the afternoon relaxing at the house so Hubby could watch the Chicago Bears game and the kids could swim, and we even took a dip ourselves at half-time. For dinner, we went to Medieval Times, which is a dinner show – it is SO fun!!! Everyone is seated around an arena, and the audience eats a Medieval-style feast while watching a show complete with horse, knights, and jousting. You are assigned a seat in a certain color section (we were green – note the crown in the picture below), and you cheer on your color knight in the jousting and games – it's a blast!!



After watching the knights duke it out, Grandma took the kids back to the house and we took Jamy on the extreme go-karts at Fun Spot. The track called The Vortex is wicked; you wind up and around 3 or 4 times until

you reach the top, and it's strange to be up so high in a go-kart. But you don't really have time to think about that, because there is a steep drop down, followed by a couple of hairpin / bowl-like turns that you have to navigate as driver of the kart! Super fun, though not for everyone. We thought this is what caused Jamy's back injury that ended up plaguing his trip, but turns out it was something else. And we took our daughters on these go-karts later in the week – with helmets of course – and our oldest hated them and wouldn't let me use the accelerator; it was SO frustrating!! Our daredevil 6-year-old Sammie loved it though, and I found her to be a passenger more willing to go my speed – pedal to the metal!!

Monday January 17 – We ate breakfast at Sizzler at their breakfast buffet, and then headed out to Universal Studios as planned despite the dire forecast of rain all day, and the weathermen were not mistaken. It was like a monsoon when we arrived, and scarcely let up all day. Many of the rides at Universal are indoor, but Hubby and I did take a bit of a gamble (and lost) when we got in line for the new Rip Ride Rockit coaster. They had to shut the ride down when they saw lightning, and wouldn't you know it, we were first in line! After investing that much time waiting, we really didn't want to get out of line, but the kids were waiting with Grandma and Jamy, so we called them to see if they were ok and able to stay dry. We waited probably about 20 minutes, and it was fun to try to read the different hand signals and procedures the staff was doing to see if we would get to ride soon or not. Finally, they opened the coaster, and we were first – test rats. This coaster looks more intimidating than it is, mostly because the first lift is straight up, face pointed at the sky, your back is parallel to the ground. Other than that, it's a pretty lame coaster; the best thing about it is that you get to choose a song to listen to while you're on it, and your song choice plays in the speakers behind your head. I chose "Devil Went Down to Georgia" which made a very good

coaster theme song, but the coaster was so tame that I was able to do some air-fiddling along to the song. I heard Hubby beside me rocking out to Gloria Gaynor's I Will Survive, and that seemed like fun too, but I wasn't about to wait in line again for this ride. The other thing that stank about the Rip Rockit is the rain – riding a coaster in the rain is not a lot of fun. The rain pelts your face; it hurts and you can't see anything, so it takes a lot of the fun out of it. And oh yeah, this is how soggy we looked when we were done riding:



Most of us made the best of the rain; after all, where we were from in Ohio the weather was sub-zero, so rainy 50's still felt good to us. Our oldest was not a happy camper, however, and she soon grew tired of walking around in the rain, even though Grandma splurged and bought the kids ponchos – I didn't think to bring any, but maybe I will next time. It never does the all-day-rain thing in Florida! It usually rains or storms for less than an hour and then the sun comes back out so we were unprepared for the all day down-pour. But seriously, how could Universal be anything but fun? Even though the rain slowed us down a bit, we were still able to catch our first glimpse of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter – it was very cool!!

Hogwarts castle was amazing, and I guess I must have misplaced the picture I made Hubby take of me in Hogsmeade, which was beautiful at night. We got some Butterbeer, and it was yummiier than the version we attempted at one of our game nights here in Ohio. The Wizarding World has 3 rides, and we

only had time to get on The Forbidden Journey on this day – that's the one inside the castle. While you wait in line, there is plenty to see – it looks like you are on the movie set except better because it doesn't look like a set – it looks real! The portraits move and talk, and there are 3D projections of Harry, Ron, and Hermione that look like real people. As you wind around the corridors of the castle, you get to explore many scenes straight from the books and movies: Dumbledore's office, Gryffindor common room – even the Sorting Hat makes an appearance! And the ride itself is *amazing*!! If you are a Harry Potter fan, this area is a **must-see**!! Though we did have a slight oopsie – while trying to rush over to the Harry Potter World before the park closed, we skipped lunch, so now we were cold, wet, and hungry. It would have been ok, except that once we snaked throughout the corridors of the Hogwarts castle, we learned that the Forbidden Journey ride was down. After waiting in the dark hallway listening to the Sorting Hat give his spiel over and over and on empty stomachs, we had had it – especially grumpy oldest who, if you remember, was not happy with the day at Universal in the rain to begin with. Our torturous wait in the hallway of Hogwarts became so irritating that I wished my husband had bought the flaming wallet we had seen at the magic show – so we could throw it at the Sorting Hat, flames and all! ☐

We did finally get on the ride, and it was awesome, but my oldest neglected to try it – she doesn't like anything faster or more thrilling than the Scrambler. As I said, the ride was amazing, so now we were all famished after a day at Universal. But being budget-conscious we wanted to leave the parks before finding dinner, though I must confess: I was so hungry that the idea of the 'whopper bar' on Universal's City Walk that had turned my stomach that very morning was actually sounding quite good after a day walking around in the rain! We ended up at Denny's, which is a place I hadn't been to in probably over a decade, and while the food wasn't great, it sufficed.

*(to be continued in part 3)*

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## Holiday Fun & Chaos

The chaos actually began Wednesday morning. Mom was working in the beauty shop... **UNTIL 11** at which time she wanted the kitchen. At ten, Dad decides it is the perfect time to strip the counter top off. Granted, it is pretty old, worn, and could stand to be replaced... but the day before we have company over for Thanksgiving?! Oh, MY... am I glad I had to go to work from 12-9.

After my 9 hour shift, I returned to see him still at it. Mom was already in bed, but I can imagine the scene at home. I would not want to have been there ☹️. At around 11.30, he decides it is good enough and **THEN** decides to run the vacuum. At 11.45, Mom comes out, gives him a dirty look, and walks back into the bedroom... nothing even needed to be said.

Thursday morning, I got up at 8 in time to shower, bring the table and chairs down from upstairs, then watch the Macy's parade. Ironically, my favorite part of the 3 hour extravaganza is not the floats, nor the balloons. It is watching the performers from Broadway shows and singing groups seeing how badly they can lip sync. Who is Boy Likes Girl? I must be getting really old! Did anyone see Gloria Gaynor and her 30 year old "I Will Survive?"

After the parade came (not the dog show) the traditional immediate family dinner. Ma and Pa, siblings and their families. I did not indulge too much because I had two other meals to attend. I did get to see Chad and his pumpkin pie

(or was it Cool Whip with a bit of pumpkin).

After digesting a bit, I ventured to another gathering. I knew I had a good amount of time between the afternoon and evening gathering so I went to the home of my wonderful friends and had smoked turkey and other delicious food. We have never had smoked turkey, but I find it enjoyable. Carol brought a game that I swear I did not cheat at. I read a few cards without looking at the answer and put them in the back of the box. It's only cheating if you look at the answer ☐ And I was treated to The Potty Movie... thanks girls. I found it quite odd that a 3 year old had a strangely deep feminine voice.

Finally, I returned home for our traditional Thanksgiving celebration with my mother's family. In total, we probably had 20-25 people in the house. It's always good to be surrounded by family and loved ones but something about the holidays makes it even greater. Maybe it's the constant ribbing Chad tries to dish out about sports but knows he is fighting a losing battle. Outnumbered about 16:1. But the Cowboys again won their gimme. Maybe that's why they always play on Turkey Day. Sorry I can't say the same for the Lions.

Finally, about 10, everyone was gone, tables and chairs put back. and I was pooped. I wanted to go back for a game night, but I did have to be at work at 6.30 this morning and I almost did not make that! Hope everyone had a great holiday giving thanks for the many blessings we receive every day!