

New York Trip Diary Volume 6

– The World Trade Center

Chapter

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from previous posts)

Sunday, March 22 – I already blogged about this day, but I had skipped the part about us visiting the World Trade Center site (aka Ground Zero) because it just didn't seem to belong in a happy family's trip diary. So consider this your warning; the following post will be emotionally heavy!

On the way there, I was just in visitor mode – on a mission to just get there. I didn't really stop to think about how emotional and how gut-wrenching the experience would be. I'm very glad we went, but man, was it emotionally taxing, to say the least. The site itself is a pit in the earth – not even a hole, they're already begun building new buildings, so really it just looks like a construction site, though if you look carefully, you can see that one piece of equipment has a hook painted like an American flag (click on the pic to make it bigger – actually I don't know that you can see the flag-painted hook in this one, sorry!):



There are fences all around, and it's difficult to even see past them until you go into the World Financial Center and look out a window and down into the site (click on any of my pics to make them bigger):



On the way to the site, we passed (yet another) street vendor, and this time, they were selling commemorative books about the 9/11 terrorist attacks. We flipped through the books, and they actually seemed interesting, so we bit and we bought. Those ended up being a great purchase though, because they contain some pictures of the catastrophe that I haven't even seen on the internet. One of the pictures in the books is of a cemetery located only a block or two from Ground Zero. The picture was taken on September 11, 2001, and the cemetery is covered in an inches-thick layer of ash and debris. We passed that same cemetery on our way to Ground Zero, and it was eerie to see what it looked like on that day. Across the street from Ground Zero, there is a statue of a business man with a briefcase; I guess it's supposed to symbolize the "every man" quality of the victims, I don't know, but there it was and here it is:



Also across the street from the site is a fire station, Ladder 10, which was heavily damaged by the attacks and collapsing skyscrapers – it actually served as a rest station for many wounded firefighters that fateful day, I later found out. The station has a memorial on the side, but we (regretfully) didn't stop long enough to take a picture. But the garage was open, and there was a firefighter who was more than happy to let our kids climb up on the fire engine, and he graciously posed with a picture of them – what a great guy! I wonder if he was with Ladder 10 during 2001 and how many of his friends were lost?



And then there was the museum. I was worried the kids would be bored, but they said it would only take 30-45 minutes to get through, and I can't be happier we went. First of all, the kids were not bored in the slightest. They enjoyed looking at the memorabilia: the damaged items, the kids drawings of support, and even the wall of "Missing" posters

that victims' loved ones had posted after the attacks. I figured September 11, 2001 is a day my kids should learn about, so why not start now? We did spare a few details, though, like the one about how people were responsible for all of it. If they had asked, I wouldn't have lied, but we just told them that planes crashed into the buildings. After we were almost through the museum, our almost 5-year-old asked me a question I'll never forget. She said, "Mom, can God put people back together?" I hugged her and explained that sometimes people get to go live with God, and that was good enough for her at that moment.

At least one thing I found cool about the museum is that they had a section about what Muslim-Americans went through after 9/11: the discrimination, the victimization, and the violence.

One thing I somehow didn't get a picture of from the museum was some silverware from the restaurant at the top of one of the towers – the spoon had a hole burned directly through it.

Here are some pictures of other things they had in the museum:



Above is a picture of an airplane window from one of the planes that hit the twin towers. Below is a picture of what was once an elevator plate labeling a floor in the Trade Center:



And below is a picture of some items that they found in the debris pile, a stuffed lamb they used to sell in the Trade Center – searchers who found him said “If he could be spared, why couldn’t the people?” Also pictured are someone’s car keys, IDs, and most eerie, a brochure from a meeting being held in the “Windows on the World” restaurant in the top of the building – note the dates say September 9-11, 2001. The thing on the right is just a melted mass of metal, concrete, and whatever else:



If you’re going to New York, I highly recommend visiting the Ground Zero museum. I don’t know the exact name of it, but it’s on Liberty Street across from Ground Zero. Bring tissues, but if you forget, they have some on the walls, and I was grateful for that. It was a very emotional experience, but I was fine until I saw a letter in a child’s scrawl dated 4/2000, before the attacks. The letter began, “My hero is my

daddy because he is a fireman..." The letter was written by a kid who lost his dad on 9/11, and that's when I lost it.

I can't imagine what those people went through, especially after seeing what happened to some of the objects that were once a part of the World Trade Center. A very humbling experience; one I will never forget...

God Bless the victims of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 and their families left behind...

Some Things I Should Clear Up...

Whenever I take a road trip, I find myself wondering about random things. Since I don't have access to the internet while I'm on vacation to look up these random things, I make a list to look up when I return home. Here is some of my look-up list from the trip to New York we just took:

– Are there bears in Pennsylvania? YES! I was wondering this as we were driving through their beautiful wooded hills, but I was still surprised to learn that there are black bears (who aren't always black) in PA. In fact, bears can be found in 50 of PA's 67 counties!

– Where did the airplane land in the Hudson River a few months ago? As I was looking at the Hudson from our hotel room, I was wondering if we were viewing the very spot (or crossing it on the ferry) where the plane landed. I found that it was just north of where we were. We probably would have seen it happen from our room; definitely from the boardwalk behind the hotel, and definitely if we had been on the ferry.

– What was that story about the chicken who lived for many years without his head? I don't know how this one came up in conversation, but it did, so here are the details as printed in wikipedia.com: *On Monday, September 10, 1945 at 6:45AM PST, farmer Lloyd Olsen of Fruita, Colorado, had his mother-in-law around for supper and was sent out to the yard by his wife to bring back a chicken. Olsen failed to completely decapitate the five-and-a-half month old bird named Mike. The axe missed the jugular vein, leaving one ear and most of the brain stem intact. On the first night after the decapitation Mike slept with his severed head under his wing. Despite Olsen's botched handiwork, Mike was still able to balance on a perch and walk clumsily; he even attempted to preen and crow, although he could do neither. After the bird did not die, a surprised Mr. Olsen decided to continue to care permanently for Mike, feeding him a mixture of milk and water via an eyedropper; he was also fed small grains of corn. Mike occasionally choked on his own mucus, which the Olsen family would clear using a syringe. When used to his new and unusual center of mass, Mike could easily get himself to the highest perches without falling. His crowing, though, was less impressive and consisted of a gurgling sound made in his throat, leaving him unable to crow at dawn. Mike also spent his time preening and attempting to peck for food with his neck. Being headless did not keep Mike from putting on weight; at the time of his partial beheading he weighed two and a half pounds, but at the time of his death this had increased to nearly eight pounds. In March 1947, at a motel in Phoenix on a stopover while traveling back home from tour, Mike started choking in the middle of the night. As the Olsens had inadvertently left their feeding and cleaning syringes at the sideshow the day before, they were unable to save Mike. Lloyd Olsen claimed that he had sold the bird off, resulting in stories of Mike still touring the country as late as 1949. Post mortem, it was determined that the axe blade had missed the carotid artery and a clot had prevented Mike from bleeding to death. Although most of his head was severed, most of his*

brain stem and one ear was left on his body. Since basic functions (breathing, heart-rate, etc) as well as most of a chicken's reflex actions are controlled by the brain stem, Mike was able to remain quite healthy. Other sources, including the Guinness Book of World Records, say that the chicken's severed esophagus passage could not take in enough air properly to be able to breathe; and therefore choked to death in the motel. So Mike the headless chicken lived for about 18 months without a head.

– Kent State Massacre – We saw lots of signs for Kent Stae on the trip, and we decided there must be a few campuses. We were wondering where the massacre happened, what year, how many people were killed, and what happened to the murderer. Kent State happened in Kent, Ohio (a little bit outside of Cleveland and Akron – so that was the same Kent State University we saw signs for). 4 students were killed and 9 wounded, some paralyzed for life. But what makes this massacre significant is that the students were shot by the Ohio National Guard – not a lone gunman gone crazy. The 3 adults in the car decided that if Kent State would have happened in more recent times, it would not be nearly as historically significant because sadly, there are many more of these types of massacres nowadays. However, I don't think any of us realized that it was the National Guard doing the shooting – which I should have; I remember studying this in Sociology class, but apparently the knowledge didn't stick...

– Murder in Small Town X – Do you remember this reality show? It was basically like a reality show of a murder mystery; there were actors, witnesses and victims. I thought it sounded cool, but I didn't watch it when it aired even though I wanted to. I was in the middle of moving out of the state I grew up in for the first time and busy with my first 2-year-old. The show was cancelled, but what was significant about it was this: The final episode aired on September 4, 2001 – exactly one week before the infamous terrorist attack on the US

– 9/11. And the last contestant standing, the guy who won the jeep and the \$250,000 prize, Angel Juarbe, was a firefighter from New York who perished in the attacks one week after the final episode of the show aired.

– What the heck does “poppy” mean? In a bizarre episode I forgot to put in my trip diary, my husband pulled up to a full serve gas pump in New Jersey without realizing it. The attendant came out and tried to take the nozzle away from my husband, who said, “I already swiped my card.” – he had no idea what this guy was doing since he didn’t know he was in full serve. The attendant snapped, “Stop asking so many questions!” and proceeded to pump the gas and kept calling my bewildered (and very tired) husband “poppy” and “boss”. As we pulled away from the gas station, we noticed we had in fact been in the full serve area, but that still didn’t clear up the mystery of all the alleged questions my husband asked and what the heck poppy means. I remembered an episode of Cops I had seen where a perp kept calling the cop “poppy”, and the cop was getting extremely irritated. “Stop calling me Poppy!”, he said, to which the perp replied, “I’m sorry poppy” and it kept going on and on like that until the cop finally charged the guy with something and hauled him off to jail, probably because they guy really just couldn’t help himself from saying “Poppy”. So what does it mean? When I looked it up, all I found was stuff about flowers and something about a nickname for a grandpa (sorry Hon!). But I tried changing the spelling, because it seemed like the guy was speaking spanish, so I tried to spell it in Spanish, and I came up with Papi. When I looked that up, I was scared about the results – it was one of those wiki-answers places, so here is a direct quote: *“To me, papi means: Daddy, Baby, My Love...you say it to the boyfriends, husbands, and sons...if you are in a committed relationship. If you are single, then to a man you have an interest in getting to know alot better.”* Giggling, I read this quote to my husband, and his eyes got really wide and he insisted that I do further research on the

subject. I don't have a lot of time on my hands for this kind of stuff, so I found the fact that different cultures have different meaning for Hispanic terms, and apparently it's common for Dominicans to call other males "papi". But it seemed to be condescending when the attendant was saying it, and I'm not sure I even have the correct spelling of papi. Anyone want to offer any help on this? Any spanish-speakers out there? Mary, you love a good mystery, I hear ☺

Well, anyway, that's about everything on the list, or all I have time to put into a blog post, anyway. I hope you learned something, least of all the randomness 3 adults talk about on a very long road trip when the kids are asleep! Some day, I will probably have internet right there in the car with me to look up these things. In fact, I will probably be *blogging* on the road trip – let's just hope I'm not the one driving!

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(continued from previous posts)

Sunday, March 22 – Learning from our mistake the previous day, we decided to eat breakfast in the room, and it was much less expensive, we had plenty of room, and we didn't have to worry about the kids disturbing anyone. After breakfast, we headed to the city again, even though we were all kind of sick of it at that point. But when I had heard that we'd be going to New York, the top site to see on my list was the World Trade Center site. So even though we were sick of the commute to the city and searching for buses, we headed out to see Ground Zero. We caught another bus tour, but this one was "hop on,

hop off", meaning you could get off at any of the stops, unlike the bus tour we had taken the night before. But in New York city traffic, we still ended up being on the bus for about an hour, much to the kids' dismay since they were starting to find the bus tours boring. But 3/4 of the kids took a nap (and hubby too!), which left me and Jamy to listen (and giggle) at the tour guide – a very hyper Asian woman with a very thick accent. She was very informative (when we could understand her, of course), but she would interject between her touring tidbits with concerns she had about the traffic – at one point she talked (nicely) to another bus, telling it we were there first and not to hit us. Another time, a man boarded the bus who was selling water and popcorn, and she felt the need to tell us, "this is not a movie theater". Duh.

Anyway, we arrived at Ground Zero, but I think I'm going to do a separate post on that experience – it really was mind-blowing.

We left the Trade Center site and went into the World Financial Center – a beautiful building where people were very nice and gave us detailed directions about how to get to the ferry without using the famous New York grunt n' gesture. The best news is that we weren't going to have to take a Waterways bus! Seems the ferry came right over to the financial district – YAY! On the way to the river, we found some gelato to buy in the financial center. Gelato is a type of Italian ice cream handmade on the spot, and it is incredible. I had trouble deciding on just 3 flavors, but I chose well: cookie dough, pistachio, and raspberry. They were all delicious, but the raspberry was especially amazing. For those of you who know me, you will be shocked to learn that I like gelato even more than I like Dippin' Dots – that is how good it is!

So we made our way to the riverfront, and when we got to the ferry station, it was closed. Honestly, you'd think that at least 1 of the 5 or more people who had given us directions would have known this, but I guess not. And I don't think

they were playing a trick on us because unlike the grunt n' gesture-ers, they were really nice – I think they just genuinely didn't know. So here we were again. Stuck in New York with no Waterways bus to be found. My husband was very smart when he read the fine print on the Waterways card we had that said Waterways buses would stop at any city bus stop on a Waterways route, so all we had to do was find one of those. We asked some not-so-friendly construction workers, who said that there were NO city bus stops on the entire street we were on. So we used the map on the Waterways card, and we went a few blocks this way and a few blocks that way, and we found a city bus stop which we thought was on a Waterways route... Unfortunately the only way to check if we were right was to sit and wait for a bus that might never come, but lo and behold, there was another Waterways bus, and my husband again jumped in front of it while we quickly scooped up all the kids before the driver changed his mind. We were really getting the hang of this now, but that was our last Waterways bus, thank goodness! Here is a picture of our 8-month-old's ET impression – Manny Jamy was the lucky baby-wearer since my back never would have tolerated it all day and we wanted to leave my husband open for our clingy 2-year-old:



We got back to the hotel which is where we had left our car, and my husband used their Wi-Fi to find us a hotel in Pittsburgh. We were having such a good time that we figured we'd extend the trip a little and make one more zoo stop. The

only problem is, we didn't make it to our Pittsburgh hotel until 3 in the morning due to a 2 hour stop at Houlihan's for dinner! Why did it take so long? We were kind of a large party, and the place was mobbed. Add in 2 poopie diapers and a bathroom full of drunks, and well, you do the math. Some guy stopped on his way to the bar to gush over the baby, and while he was doing that, his girlfriend took a nasty spill up the bar stairs, glass (already empty, of course) flying out of her hand and everything. Instead of trying to get up, she just lay there, probably because she was so drunk (she wasn't hurt; I saw her later and she was fine), and her equally drunk boyfriend didn't even notice all of this. So I said, "Is she ok?" and when he turned to look, I fled with the baby. Interesting experience, but one that makes me even more thankful for home sweet home – we never have those kinds of crowds in our restaurants! Like I said, we got to our Pittsburgh hotel about 3 in the morning, and we had kids who didn't want to go back to sleep. But we finally got them down, and we got a few hours of shut-eye before it was time to get up and add a new zoo to my list!

A Day In New York

Glad I could tie two events of the past month together. Our final hours in the Big Apple were some of the most thought provoking and emotional. It began after we decided to have breakfast delivered instead of doing the hotel restaurant again. We made our way back across the river for another bus tour. This time on a jump on and off trek. Our hostess was a barrel of laughs and energy. At one stop, a vendor jumped on offering refreshments. The guide quipped that "this is not a movie theatre" in a decidedly Oriental accent. After 9 stops, we arrived at our destination.

Ground zero itself created a very heavy feeling within me. Seeing the empty skyline was nothing compared to actually being up close to the site surrounded by a fence behind which the memorial is being constructed complete with the 1776 foot tall Freedom Tower. The 9/11 exhibit was also an emotional journey. Artifacts on display recovered from the wreckage of the hi-jacked planes, the buildings, even a stuffed lamb that was buried and somehow survived intact (symbolism, anyone?). Video tributes of the tragedies and heroes. Downstairs, letters written by children of different cultures were on display. Many of these were so heartfelt that it was hard to keep a dry eye.

Following the tour of the exhibit, we had to once again make our way to the pier to get back to the hotel. We thought we were in luck when we were directed to the front of the Commerce Building where there was to be a dock where a ferry came and went. Not so luckily, the dock is closed on Sunday. SOOOO WE HAD TO FIND YET ANOTHER WATERWAY BUS to take us to the pier we were accustomed to. That is a story best left for another time... I may just let taylhis relate that adventure.

Finally, we got back to the Jersey shore and went to dinner before departing. On our way out of Jersey, we stopped for gas. Chris got out, started pumping gas, and was immediately confronted by an attendant who began shouting at him. Apparently, we had inadvertantly come across one of the few remaining full service pumps in existence. But outbursts like "Papi" were heard. I thought he was a fan of David Ortiz (wrong area to be one of those... YUCK). By the time the gas was pumped, Chris was promoted (?) to "Boss." On the way out, it was discovered that we were unsure if the rattled attendant attached the fuel cap... sure enough after travelling a few blocks, we found out that it was not.