

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. ☐

What Will Happen To Marvel Island?

From the Financial Pages today – business news is not something I usually write about, but you'll see why the following story would interest me:

[Disney To Acquire Marvel Entertainment](#)

Our family frequents the Orlando Florida area, home of Disney World and also their major competitor – Universal Studios. For those of you who don't know, at Universal's Islands of Adventure (the newer and more thrill-ride oriented of Universal's two Orlando parks), there is an entire area called Marvel Superhero Island®. So my question is, now that Disney, Universal's biggest competitor and business enemy, has bought Marvel, what will happen to Superhero Island at Islands of Adventure? I can't imagine that Universal would want to keep the same characters, now owned by Disney, at their park. And I can't imagine Disney letting Universal keep the characters at their park, unless the price was right, of course. But based upon the competitiveness that is obvious to the tourists flocking to the area, Disney's superhero lease price would probably put Universal out of business!

[Marvel's Superhero Island](#) currently contains (click the link for an interactive map – Superhero Island is on the left side of the park, just left of the main gate) the following attractions: The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman, The Incredible Hulk Coaster, Doctor Doom's Fear Fall, and Storm Force Accelatron, which we've always skipped since it seemed like Universal's answer to Disney's Teacup ride. We always skipped Doctor Doom also since it's a free-fall ride and I'm afraid to go on those. I think my husband went on this one however, but I don't remember him saying it was any different from the rest of these types of rides. In short, it probably

won't be much of a problem to rename these two rides. The Hulk coaster is an awesome coaster and should also be able to withstand the re-themeing, although it might need a paint job to change its current green/purple Hulk theme. The Adventures of Spiderman is another story. This ride is awesome! There really isn't anything else like it in either of the two parks. It's basically like taking a thrill ride *into* a 3D Spiderman movie. I guess they'd have to choose a new character and make a new movie. Whatever they do, I hope it's as good as the original Spiderman ride! Also complicating a theming switch would be the superheros and villians that walk around Marvel's Superhero Island. I guess all the costumes would be sold to Disney. Perhaps Disney will build a superhero section – my guess would be at ~~MGM~~ Hollywood Studios if I had to pick a place.

And Universal would have an entire area to theme and fill. Hmmm, imagine the possibilities...

Let's see, would they coincide the new area with a new movie coming out (Smurfs (sorry Carol), Jetsons – not sure if those are Universal movies)? Or would they take one of their existing franchises (Simpsons – they'd have to move that super-cool new ride from the Studios park to the Islands park!, NBC land (The Office – The Ride!)) and create a whole new world? Any ideas?

****UPDATE** – From orlandosentinel.com:** *"...theme-park rival Universal Orlando will likely retain the park rights to its four Marvel superstars, including Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk...*

...Universal's contracts apparently gives it exclusive U.S. rights east of the Mississippi River for theme-park attractions built around certain of those characters, notably Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, X-Men and Dr. Doom.

Universal Orlando said Marvel characters will remain a staple at its parks.

"Marvel Super Hero Island at Universal's Islands of Adventure

and the Marvel characters are an important part of the Universal Orlando experience. They will remain so," said Tom Schroder, a Universal spokesman. "Our agreement with Marvel stands for as long as we follow the terms of our existing contract and for as long as we want there to be a Marvel Super Hero Island."

So in response to several comments from blog readers, there are a separate set of rights for the Marvel characters in question – theme park rights.

VIPs For A Day (part two of even more parts)

So, where did I leave off when I blogged about our kid-less [day trip to King's Island](#) amusement park? I don't remember; I got kind of side-tracked and have made a few unrelated blog posts since then... But no matter, I'll just begin by rating the rides at King's Island; my scale is 1-5 ♦'s, 1 being not so good and 5 being a perfect ride experience.

The Beast – 4½♦. I have an in-depth description of this one in my previous post, but I will recap again – very cool wooden roller coaster; built into the existing terrain of the Miami River valley in southern Ohio which means you can be speeding along not more than 3 feet above the ground, thinking you must travel a lift before you can drop, but that's not the case! This is the longest wooden roller coaster in the **world** with a 4 minute and 50 second ride time. Like any wooden coaster, it can be rough and rickety (I was sure I threw out my bad back on one of the speeding curves, but thankfully, I did not. Shhh, don't tell anyone I ride coasters with a bad back, but

it must not be that bad since my back was one of my least sore parts the day after King's Island), but these sensations improve if you ride the front row – I HIGHLY recommend the front seats on this one!

Diamondback – $4\frac{1}{2}\diamond$ – I also talked about the park's newest addition in my previous post, so here is another recap. Exceptionally smooth ride, with no upside-down air time. Rather, the only air time is achieved when your butt *lifts* from your seat on the multiple drops. The sensation of free-falling is achieved by the restraint system – one smallish plastic piece that sits between your legs – that's it! The picture I posted in my previous blog doesn't do justice to the coaster, so here is another:



I know certain readers of mine will notice that this is indeed a computer-generated picture, so I might as well just say that outright. The first time we went on Diamondback, I **loved** it, and it would have gotten an even higher rating from me if it were not for the time we rode it in the front row. Unlike The Beast, the front row of the Diamondback adds an entire new dimension to the ride – one I was happy enough without! I respect our tour guide's opinion that riding front on Diamondback is a must-do experience, and even though it wasn't for me, I'm glad I got to do it once. But it was S0000 scary!

Firehawk – Holy (excuse my language) crap. This is one doozy of a coaster!!! Wow, I forgot to rate it, hmmm let me think... $3\frac{3}{4}\diamond$. First let me explain what this coaster is, and then I can explain what would have made it better. The riders load

into Firehawk, and then the seats recline until the rider is *lying down*. Not for the faint of heart – you are strapped into flexible (not hard plastic like most) shoulder harnesses, and then you are tilted backward until you are lying on your back – and it even feels like your head might just be lower than your feet. So anyway, lying down, the rider leaves the station, and proceeds to go up a hill, head first, facing the sky. So of course you can't see when you're going to reach the top. And when you finally do reach the top of the lift, you flip until you're flying Superman-style through the trek of the coaster. Overall, it was awesome, and I have to say that I truly misjudged how ultimately different the horizontal sensation would be – it was VERY different. What kept me from giving this coaster a higher rating, however, was this (and a discussion on the long ride home found my husband thinking the same thing): For a unique roller coaster where you were supposed to feel like you were flying, especially for one of the first and only of this type (this is the only one in Ohio, I believe), they really could and should have simplified the design. Instead of all the inversions, corkscrews and loops, they should have actually slowed down the coaster and left the rider suspended belly-down for the majority of the ride. After people experienced that, THEN they could have added the speed and all the inversion stuff in an update version of the ride, and it would have been like a 2-fer – 2 rides, one idea. The way it was, the ride was so fast that you really didn't have the time to pretend to be Superman, and that was a shame. The woman in our row the second time we rode Firehawk was, and I quote, "terrified". My husband told her it wasn't that bad, and when he told her that, I was thinking, "What are you thinking? It IS terrifying!". I just did not think that being on our backs face up on our way up the lift was the right time to tell a stranger that my opinion differed from my husband's – it's not like she could check my face for my true feelings. The woman found out for herself. I think she liked it though, as did I in the end, despite the changes I would make. Another fun thing about this coaster is that while

waiting in line (or by-passing the line on your VIP tour, highly recommended please see my first King's Island post), you get to pass next to the part of the ride where it first slows down as the riders come back into the station. You can hear the riders' very first reactions to the crazy configuration of this coaster, and that is a really cool time-filler!

Flight of Fear – 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ♦. It does feel strange to rate this and the previous coaster the same since they are two very different ride experiences, so I feel the need to disclaim that I'm rating my overall ride experience. Keep in mind that I am no longer in my 20's, so I've lost my reckless abandonment. I really like roller coasters, but I do draw the line and find some things too scary – so my rating system might vary from that of a true coaster enthusiast. But anyway, I liked Flight of Fear, largely because it is like a much better version of Disney's Space Mountain. My husband likened it to the Aerosmith Rock N Roller Coaster at Disney's ~~MGM~~ Hollywood Studios – which I loved, but I found it more like a much improved Space Mountain. All 3 are dark indoor coasters. Flight of Fear and Aerosmith have what they call linear induction launches, which is how smart people say "0-54mph in 4 seconds!". On the way home, I was browsing through (ahh, life without kids in the car!) the super-cool stat sheets our guide gave us as parting gifts, and I noted that Flight of Fear was the first ride in the world with the linear induction launch! It was SO much cooler than Space Mountain; much more smooth and with inversions. Space Mountain is herky-jerky, and there are no drops nor inversions – it's almost kind of like, what's the point? THIS is Magic Kingdom's thrill ride? But then again, Magic Kingdom really isn't like that – you visit with small children and/or for the small child inside yourself. But my point is, Flight of Fear is SO much better than Space Mountain, but not quite as good as the Aerosmith coaster – perhaps something to do with Aerosmith's black light fluorescent graphics versus the plain

darkness of Flight of Fear; I preferred the graphics. For a tangent, here is an interesting story about Flight of Fear: as I mentioned, we had a guide for our trip to this park. Other park visitors would see he was an employee and ask him questions throughout the day. One of the questions was "Is Flight of Fear still open?". Our guide said yes, not really knowing what the guest was talking about until later during the behind-the-scenes tour of The Beast when the park's PR Manager, Don Helbig (who has ridden The Racer, another wooden coaster, almost 12,000 times! How does one even count that high, especially when being tossed around on a wooden coaster?) told us that one of his job's challenges was to dispel the rumors about the park given life by the internet. One of those rumors he talked about happened to be that Flight of Fear met its demise. Not true – Flight of Fear is alive and well and also well worth riding, especially if you are a person who is used to Space Mountain. I think I can pretty much guarantee you will like Flight of Fear better.

Well... I have once again ~~talked~~ blogged your ear (?) off with my boring detailed account of an event. I wanted to rate most of the enjoyable rides at King's Island, but I must cut the post short for now – maybe I will be able to get the other cool rides in the next post if I cool it a little and shorten the detail... Until then...

Wasn't It Yesterday...

when we were small?

I dunno... feeling nostalgic but I took out my senior year yearbook (Log of E) the other day just to see how much I remembered. Best facial expressions, moi? There was also a

baby picture section. I honestly do remember the picture... not the actual posing, but... Actually having a head full of hair!

Then the not so proud moments of my class. Those who did not graduate and actually had "Did Not Graduate" printed right underneath their photo. Not the most flattering thing to have under your picture I would say. I do not remember seeing the senior photo of the aforementioned inmate who made a few appearances on America's Most Wanted. I don't know whose bright idea it was to post the DNG, but why defame our class with that?

Our senior trip to Florida was memorable for many reasons. Ours was the first class to have the opportunity since the class of 1988. Ironically, my second brother was in this class and my mother was the class advisor. And the stories I heard about that! Even more ironic, the class of 1992 was the "good" class. Well... the class of 1993 was the last class to go on a trip because of some of the goings on of our trip. I almost felt left out because I was one of the few who was not called to the principal's room days after our return.

The trip was fantastic! On my first trip to the Walt Disney World Resort, I was pulled from 2 different audiences to participate in some of the shows at the (previously known as) Disney/MGM Studio. For some reason, the Superstar Television attraction was discontinued. However, I was put into a scene as a butler in a Three Stooges short in which I got thrown into a pie tossing battle. I hit Curly right in the face and actually got one in return.

I had actually forgotten that a female classmate was called down along with me for the Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular in which some of the action sequences from the first three films were recreated by a stuntman. I was asked to demonstrate an evil belly laugh as part of my "audition." The show was full of pyrotechnics and other eye-catching trickery. I'm actually amazed that I remember most of this as if it were yesterday.

Another forgotten flashback courtesy of the yearbook was a harmless, yet not so flattering photo snapped of me in the hotel room. Which I must admit was more flattering than someone losing their swimsuit while going down a slide at Wet 'n' Wild. One of the stories that I heard about the class of '88's trip.

And Your Favorite Muppet Is?

Recently I came across an interesting article about everyone's favorite comedians, the Muppets! I grew up watching the Muppets; whether it was on the various incarnations of their tv shows (The Muppet Show, Muppets Tonight, etc.), their feature films, Sesame Street, or even in their hilarious Muppets 3D attraction at Disney's Hollywood (formerly MGM) Studios in Florida. Here are some fun facts about 20 of the Muppets that you might not know:

1. Cookie Monster: Jim Henson drew some monsters eating various snacks for a General Foods commercial in 1966. The commercial was never used, but Henson recycled one of the monsters (the "Wheel-Stealer") for an IBM training video in 1967 and again for a Fritos commercial in 1969. By that time, he had started working on Sesame Street and decided this monster would have a home there.

2. Elmo: The way it's described by a Sesame Street writer, apparently this extra red puppet was just lying around. People would try to do something with him, but nothing really panned out. In 1984, puppeteer Kevin Clash picked up the red puppet and started doing the voice and the personality and it clicked – thus, Elmo was born.

3. Telly Monster was originally the Television Monster when he

debuted in 1979. He was obsessed with TV and his eyes would whirl around as if hypnotized whenever he was in front of a set. After a while, producers started worrying about his influence on youngsters, so they changed him to make him the chronic worrier he is now.

4. Count von Count made his first appearance in 1972 and was made out of an Anything Muppet pattern – a blank Muppet head that could have features added to it to make various characters. He used to be more sinister – he was able to hypnotize and stun people and he laughed in typical scary-villain-type fashion after completing a count of something and thunder and lightning would occur. He was quickly made more appealing to little kids, though. He is apparently quite the ladies' man – he has been linked to Countess von Backward, who loves to count backward; Countess Dahling von Dahling and Lady Two.

5. Kermit was “born” in 1955 and first showed up on “Sam and Friends,” a five-minute puppet show by Jim Henson. The first Kermit was made out of Henson's mom's coat and some ping pong balls. At the time, he was more lizard-like than frog-like. By the time he showed up on Sesame Street in 1969, though, he had made the transition to frog. There are rumors that he got the name Kermit from a childhood friend of Henson's or a puppeteer from the early days of the Muppets, but Henson always refuted both of those rumors. Mental Floss: 15 reasons Mr. Rogers was the best neighbor ever

6. Real Swedish Chef Lars “Kuprik” Bäckman claims he was the inspiration for the Swedish Chef. He was on “Good Morning America,” he says, and caught Jim Henson's eye. Henson supposedly bought the rights to the show's recording and created the Swedish Chef (who DOES have a real name, but it's not understandable). One of the Muppet writers, Jerry Juhl, says that in all of the years of working with Jim Henson on the Swedish Chef, he never heard that the character was based on a real person.

7. Animal: The Who's Keith Moon may have inspired everyone's favorite member of Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem. This is speculation, but people who support the theory will point out that Jim Henson named one of the Fraggle Rock characters "Wembley," which is the town where Moon was born.

8. Miss Piggy is apparently from Iowa. She started as a minor character on "The Muppet Show," but anyone who knows Miss Piggy can see that she wouldn't settle for anything "minor." Her first TV appearance was actually on an Herb Alpert special. It wasn't until 1976, when "The Muppet Show" premiered, that she became the glamorous blonde with a penchant for frog that we know and love today. Frank Oz once said that Miss Piggy grew up in Iowa; her dad died when she was young and her mother was mean. She had to enter beauty contests to make money.

9. Rowlf the Dog, surprise, surprise, was first made in 1962 for a series of Purina Dog Chow commercials. He went on to claim fame as Jimmy Dean's sidekick on The Jimmy Dean Show and was on every single episode from 1963 to 1966. Jimmy Dean said Rowlf got about 2,000 letters from fans every week. He was considered for Sesame Street but ended up becoming a regular on "The Muppet Show" in 1976. Mental Floss: Commercials from a late-80s airing of 'A Muppet Family Christmas'

10. Oscar the Grouch is performed by the same guy who does Big Bird, Carroll Spinney. Spinney said he based Oscar's cranky voice on a particular New York cab driver he once had the pleasure of riding with. He was originally an alarming shade of orange. In Pakistan, his name is Akhtar and he lives in an oil barrel. In Turkey, he is Kirpik and lives in a basket. And in Israel, it's not Oscar at all – it's his cousin, Moishe Oofnik, who lives in an old car.

11. Gonzo: What exactly is Gonzo? Nobody knows. Even Jim Henson had no particular species in mind. Over the course of "The Muppet Show," "Muppet Babies" and various Muppet movies,

Gonzo has been referred to as a “Whatever”, a “Weirdo” and an alien. Whatever he is, he first appeared on the scene in 1970’s The Great Santa Claus Switch. His name was Snarl the Cigar Box Frackle. In 1974, he showed up on a TV special for Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass. He became Gonzo the Great by the first season of The Muppet Show and developed his thing for Camilla the Chicken almost accidentally: During one episode where chickens were auditioning for the show, puppeteer Dave Goelz ad-libbed, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you... nice legs, though!” It was decided then and there that Gonzo would have a bizarre romantic interest in chickens.

12. You have to love Statler and Waldorf. I couldn’t find much on their particular inspiration, but I can tell you that they’ve been around since the 1975 “Muppet Show” pilot. They are named after popular New York City hotels (the Statler Hotel was renamed the Hotel Pennsylvania in 1992.) Guess what Waldorf’s wife name is? Yep... Astoria (she looks startlingly like Statler.) FYI, Waldorf is the one with the mustache and white hair. Statler has the grey hair. Apparently Waldorf has had a pacemaker for more than 30 years.

13. Beaker: I always thought of Beaker and his buddy Bunsen Honeydew as characters that came along later in the Muppet timeline, but they have been around since the “The Muppet Show.” Although Beaker usually says things along the lines of, “Mee-mee-mee-mee!”, he has had a few actual lines: “Sadly temporary,” “Bye-Bye” and “Make-up ready!” Despite being word-challenged, he manages to do a pretty convincing Little Richard impression and, surprisingly, had mad beatbox skills. Beaker is one of the only Muppets that was never recycled from some other purpose – he was created solely for “The Muppet Show.”

14. Fozzie Bear. Poor Fozzie. He’s the perpetual target of Statler and Waldorf because of his horrible jokes and puns. It actually created a bit of a problem during the first season of The Muppet Show, because when Fozzie got heckled, he got very

upset and sometimes cried. Viewers didn't feel sympathy; they felt embarrassed. The problem was solved by making Fozzie an optimist so that even when he got heckled he was good-natured about it. It's often thought that he was named after Frank Oz, who was his puppeteer, but Frank said it's just a variant of "fuzzy bear." Yet another story says he was named for his builder, Faz Fazakas. Wocka wocka!!

15. Bert and Ernie are the Muppet version of Felix and Oscar ("The Odd Couple," for you young'uns). Lots of people think Bert and Ernie were named for some minor characters in *It's A Wonderful Life*, but according to the Henson company, that's just a rumor. Jim Henson always maintained that it was just a coincidence – the names just went well together and seemed to fit the characters. Jerry Juhl, one of the head writers, corroborated this and said that Jim Henson had no memory for details like that and would have never remembered the name of the cop and the taxi cab driver in the old Jimmy Stewart movie. Other rumors to clear up: Bert and Ernie aren't gay and neither one of them are dead. Now that we've got that straightened out, here are a few more tidbits: the original Ernie used to have a gravelly voice similar to Rowlf the Dog's. Frank Oz was Bert's puppeteer and hated him at the beginning. He thought Bert was ridiculously boring, but then realized that he could have a lot of fun with being boring. Jim Henson once said, "I remember trying Bert and Frank tried Ernie for a while. I can't imagine doing Bert now, because Bert has become so much of a part of Frank."

16. Grover: Everyone's favorite "cute, furry little monster" made his TV debut on the "Ed Sullivan Show" in 1967. At the time, he was known as "Gleep" and was a monster in Santa's Workshop. He then appeared on the first season of *Sesame Street*, but sported green fur and a reddish-orange nose. He didn't have a name then, but by the second season he transformed into the Grover we know today, more or less – electric blue fur and a pink nose. The original green Grover

was reincarnated as Grover's Mommy for a few episodes. In Latin America and Puerto Rico Grover is known as Archibaldo, in Spain he is Coco, in Portugal he is Gualter and in Norway he is Gunnar.

17. Sweetums is one of a handful of full-body Muppets. He showed up in 1971 on the TV special "The Frog Prince." This is where he got his name – when Sir Robin the Brave is about to defeat the ogre, a witch shows up and changes him into a frog (who later becomes Robin, Kermit's nephew). Apparently smitten with the ogre, the witch tells her darling "Sweetums" that he can have the frog for breakfast. Bigger fame awaited Sweetums, though – in 1975, he appeared on Cher's variety show to do a duet with her to "That Old Black Magic". He officially joined "The Muppet Show" cast in 1976.

18. Rizzo the Rat might sound familiar to you, especially if you've seen "Midnight Cowboy" – he is named for Dustin Hoffman's character, Ratso Rizzo. He was created after puppeteer Steve Whitmire was inspired by rat puppets made from bottles. He first showed up on "The Muppet Show" as one of a group of rats following Christopher Reeve around – he's easy to spot because he hams it up more than any of the other rats. He occasionally performs with Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem.

19. Pepe the King Prawn's full name is Pepino Rodrigo Serrano Gonzales. I heart Pepe. He was a chef in Madrid before going Hollywood on "Muppets Tonight" in 1996. He was paired with Seymour the Elephant (Pepe was originally going to be a mouse) on the show, but Seymour never developed quite the same following and was only in two episodes. He rarely gets names right – some of his mispronunciations include "muffins" instead of Muppets, "Kermin" instead of Kermit and "Scooper" instead of Scooter. He's quite full of himself – in addition to thinking that he's quite the ladies' man, he also fully expects to win several Oscars.

20. Herry Monster from Sesame Street was the Big Bad Wolf in his original incarnation, which you can kind of tell by looking at his fur. It's pretty wolf-like (if wolves were blue, I mean). He became a Sesame monster in 1970 to replace the Beautiful Day Monster, who looked kind of like Sam the Eagle and existed to cause destruction wherever he went, thus ruining the beautiful day people had been having before he showed up. Herry used to have a furry nose but got upgraded to his non-furry, purple nose in 1971.

The preceding article was written by Stacy Conradt and was published on cnn.com

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And for your enjoyment (and so you can get this song stuck in your head for days on end), here is the Muppets catchy performance of Mahna Mahna – it's a really fun video to watch!