

At Least The Party Was A Success

This afternoon, the family made the @ 2 hour trek to our cousin's home in Huron... not a "fur piece" from the Amazement Park.. in fact once we exited, we had the choice of turning left to go to DRM's or right to go to the Point. This time, the left turn (at Albuquerque) won out. □ I had never been to the house before as I seem to have been involved in one production or another when the birthdays arose. For some reason, I am not involved in any shows so I was really excited to make the trip! I must say that it is a very nice place.

Next time when there is not so much craziness, I will ask for the guided tour.

As usual, fun was had with some gentle ribbing among some and catching up with relatives and a friend I rarely get to see.

Almost 20 years since *Annie*! WHAAAATTT??!!!!!! Food glorious food. An abundance of pizza, ICE CREAM CAKE (one of the greatest inventions ever), and more. Something unusual in the festivities... a pinata in which you pull streamers instead of hitting the object with a stick. Did someone see the youtube video of my brother attempting to hit Spongebob? Needless to say that the pulling of the streamers was a bit anticlimactic.

I must say that the 4 year old birthday girl made out like a bandit: Princess paraphernalia, My Little Pony (everything old is new again), the obligatory clothing, and a bicycle.

FUN TIMES!

While the merriment of celebration continued, the highlight of the evening turned out to be a lowlight. The Buckeyes played (if you want to call it that) abysmally. Listening to it on the way home on the radio was bad enough, I would have hated to watch it. I read on my Nook most of the way (I was a passenger in the car not the driver).

Next summer, I think a trip to the park will be LONG overdue!
I've been to the Island since I have been to the Point!

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 stomachached 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!

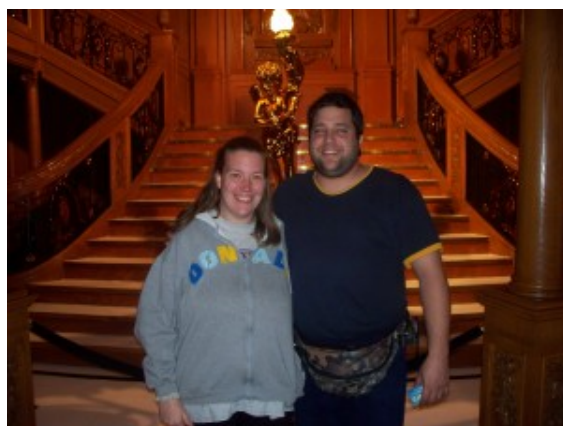
So back to the Titanic exhibit... I've always wanted to see it,

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?!?

VIP Squared

Every year, my husband and I are very lucky to get a week-long break from being busy parents of 4 kids when Grandma takes the kids to her house for a week. For the past two years during this vacation, we traveled downstate to King's Island, an amusement park near Cincinnati. King's Island offers a VIP Tour, which means that for 9 hours, you get your own personal park employee to lead you around the park and to the **front of all the park rides of your choosing**, even holding your stuff if you really want him to! In case you're interested, a VIP Tour at King's Island also includes an all-you-can-eat lunch buffet, unlimited fountain drinks all day, a ride photo, an ice cream cone, a behind-the-scenes tour of The Beast, and \$25 in park souvenir money – which can be spent on carnival style games, buying more food (if you need it after the buffet!), or in the park's gift shops. While it may seem expensive up front, if you do the math, the VIP Tour ends up being a great deal all things considered, and we highly recommend it; especially if you're a coaster enthusiast!

Being able to walk to the front of any ride line of one's choosing is really cool – it's hard to imagine, until you ride coaster after coaster without pause!

We began our day on The Beast (only because the Diamondback was not functioning, but luckily our fears of it being broken for the entire day were dispelled and they were able to fix it before long). The Beast is an almost 5-minute long journey into the desolate forests of southern Ohio on a wooden roller coaster! As we learned from our behind the scenes tour (included with the VIP Tour as I said), prior to its unveiling in 1979, The Beast was built on-site and follows closely the terrain upon which it is built. It was not pre-ordered and shipped to the park in segments like many modern roller coasters.



The Beast follows
its native land's
terrain and
disappears into a
tunnel at the
bottom of its
first drop

After riding The Beast twice in a row (almost 10 minutes worth of roller coasters right there!!), we moved on to the Vortex, an old-school steel roller coaster with more than a few high speed inversions. I had printed out my blog post I had written about the VIP Tour a year before, and it served as a helpful guide for this year. And I have to say, everything was much more enjoyable this year – last year I had written in my blog that I didn't like the Vortex much and that the Backlot Stunt Coaster was lame, but this year both rides were much more fun than I had remembered – perhaps because I knew what to expect from the park, and so the element of surprise was minimized. I'm a person who likes to know what to expect rather than to be completely taken by surprise – I have 4 little kids, so I have enough surprises throughout my average day, thank you ☐

But whatever the case, whichever the reason, this year's VIP Tour was even more fun than last year's! All of the rides we rode were better than I had remembered they were, and the Whitewater Canyon water ride was even more fun when riding

with friends! Of course, I think it helped that this year's temperature was almost 90° instead of the unseasonal 70° we had during last year's tour – getting soaked last year left us near frozen! And I learned a little bit from last year's tour – no blisters from walking around in wet shoes for me! I brought a little bag and put a change of shoes in it. As much as it may have annoyed my co-VIPs (but then again, I was the only gal in a group of men), I changed into my flip-flops every time we got on a water ride. Not only did I save my feet from blistering, but I got to order our guide to carry my shoes around the park! Ok, so I actually felt pretty badly making the poor guy carry my shoes around, but it was kind of like being a queen for a day, and – carrying our stuff **was** his job after all...



The Diamondback
Roller Coaster

Being led around the park by a guide all day, slipping in front of the 'regular guests' to get to the front of the lines (and picking whatever spot you choose on all the rides! Note to self for next year: front car on The Beast rocks, back row on the Diamondback is sweet, and the back is ideal and technically the front for Firehawk...) gave us plenty of time for 'extras' in the park: things we don't normally do in theme parks, usually for lack of time like souvenir shopping, playing games and seeing shows. The show we chose to see this year – and it's strange, I know, that I keep promising myself a theater break but still I continue to find myself in a

theater audience – was called ‘Too Much TV’, and it was actually pretty fun! It began with a ‘host’ who went around the audience asking for them to ‘name that tune’ as different tv show theme songs were played. I thought I would be good at this kind of thing, but apparently my brain had been scrambled upon one (ok, a dozen) too many roller coasters earlier in the day because I couldn’t get any of the answers correct. But it’s ok, I didn’t raise my hand too high- unlike a fellow VIP who was called upon, but he answered correctly and won himself a Too Much TV button – way to go! Despite a fleeting regret in the beginning of the show (am I really watching yet another stage show?!?), I did enjoy myself. I recognized 100% of the show titles and about 80% of the lyrics since I used to be a huge tv fan and had watched many of the shows when I was a kid (many in reruns; I’m not THAT old!) The show included 6 dancer-singers, and it began with TV shows from the 50’s – 60’s (a few of these I watched like Patty Duke and Mary Tyler Moore – um, in reruns of course □ while the rest I just knew the themes since they were very famous like the Andy Griffith Show) and continued to shows from the 70s (3’s Company, Brady Bunch, Partridge Family, etc), 80’s-90’s (Full House, Perfect Strangers, Growing Pains, Friends, etc). LOTS of fun, especially for a former TV junkie like myself. The singers / dancers were pretty good, and I have to say that one of the highlights of the show was that during the Brady Bunch theme, they showed clips from the episode where the Brady’s actually visit King’s Island!! I had totally forgotten that episode (I used to be a huge Brady Bunch fan; I watched it every day in syndication after school, and I had the book / episode guide written by Mr. Greg Brady (Barry Williams) himself – I used to check off the episodes I had seen – ahem, NERD!!), but anyway, I will have to dig it up on youtube.com or somewhere and watch it again now!!

Miraculously, the rain held off until minutes after our guide was dismissed for the day – we had been watching the storms move in all day the day before our tour, hoping it wouldn’t

affect our trip. We had promised our guide an email depicting our thoughts on what riding The Beast was like in the dark, but as I said, it began to rain, and we were forced to take a break. That's when we realized just how tired we really were – too tired to wait for the rain to stop and the rides to re-open, so we'll have to experience The Beast at night next year. And I could not be looking forward to it more!!

On the way home, we found a White Castle (don't have them way up here in the bufu northwestern corner of Ohio), or at least that's what the sign said. But the White Castle location was connected to a gas station, and the sliders did not taste quite the same... I thought they were just old until I brought some home and re-heated them, and they STILL were a bit off... hmmm.... Normally these things reheat really well, and I'm sorry to tell the White Castle newbie in our group that he still hasn't really tried an authentic slider. They hit the spot at the time and had we taken the time to stop anywhere else, we would have gotten home even later than the 1 am-ish that we did and would have been even more exhausted. My bodily soreness from being beat up by various coasters all day was less than last year, but it also lasted a day or two longer than I remember. Oh well, more to tweak for next year! Maybe I will bring TWO pairs of shoes for Mr. Guide to carry around for me, haha!

And one final note... We have a running joke with a member of our group – we went to Disney World with him almost two years ago, and it seemed that every ride which he rode stalled; including rides that didn't usually stall. At King's Island, only one ride stalled while we were on it, but we got stuck in what I am sure is the most precarious position in which a person can get stuck at that park – flat on our backs, under the great blue sky on the Firehawk. Here is a picture of how we were stuck; note that these people are in the station, which would have been better since there were people around to help. We were stuck flat on our backs *outside* of the station

for about 10-15 minutes, and I couldn't help but notice how sympathetic the ride operator seemed during her announcements directing us to stay calm.



Also noticeable were the extremely red faces and disoriented nature of our fellow riders who were finally returned to an upright position and allowed to leave the ride with us. For the record, our park guide happened to be on the Firehawk with us (on the VIP Tour, you can also make your guide go on rides!) and said that he had never seen it stuck like that before. So yeah, while we were only stuck on a ride once during our day, what a place to be stuck!!!

And surely I don't want to leave you with a bad impression of the Firehawk, nor of King's Island, so here are some fun youtube videos from other riders:

Firehawk (you lie on your back and then are flipped after the lift onto your stomach. Like Superman, you fly thru a series of loops, inversions, and open track):

Next, not one of my favorite rides at King's Island, though still fun, the joy in Invertigo is watching the person's face who is sitting across from you. Ride with a friend sitting across from you, and experience the g-forces backwards first. Then watch your friend's face as they experience the same thing backwards you just did – It's priceless!!

And now for my favorites, The Beast (start watching at a minute and ten seconds into the video for the real action):

And the Diamondback:

All this watching the POV cams on the coasters makes me want to do it all over again... But unfortunately I have to wait... So until next year...

Magic After 112 Years

If you are a tangents.org fan, then you've already read two riveting accounts of a little tangents field trip of sorts to Cincinnati Ohio. I don't mean to be redundant, but I'm going to post my take on the excursion for my friends and remote members of my family to read my take on the trip.

We began our journey bright and early Monday morning, July 19, and I like how the other tangenteers failed to mention that the keys were accidentally locked in the trunk. Someone, I forget who (and I'm not going to mention who it was that locked the keys in the trunk except that it wasn't me), but someone had the brilliant revelation that the back seat could pull down, thus saving us a 30-mile round-trip drive to get the spare set of keys. Us 4 adults (3 of my kids were with Grandma, and my little boy stayed with a family friend since he couldn't have gone on roller coasters at King's Island the following day) crammed into a little Sunfire, and somehow I got the privileged front seat for the whole trip – hey no complaints here, I was so much less sore than I was after last year's trip – I don't think I could say that if I had been crammed in the back of the Sunfire for two days. But taking the little car was necessary because we estimate that we saved around \$70 in gas by not taking our gas-guzzling mini-van, so thanks to the owner of the Sunfire for letting us put the miles on his car.

We arrived at our first tourist destination, the wonderful

Cincinnati Zoo with more than enough time (or so we thought) to explore the entire humongous zoo complex. I just love the Cincinnati Zoo – we visited years ago, and I don't really remember much about that visit, other than accidentally driving our car into the zoo... But they seemed to have fixed that entry problem by now. Hubby and I visited this zoo last year, but we didn't leave early enough, and after some delays and the 4-hour drive, we really didn't see much of the zoo. But this year, we had left bright and early and were prepared to stay all day, despite the 90°+ weather. I was appointed tour guide (why? I don't know – I'm a pretty big zoo enthusiast, I guess, and I'm a pretty good navigator until you throw hills or mountains into the equation. And the Cincinnati Zoo has more than a few large hills and low valleys to navigate around, but we did well – Hubby and being especially thankful that we didn't happen to have kids to carry or a double-stroller to push up all those hills in that heat!!!)

Cincinnati has a WIDE array of species to see! Some I had scarcely heard of, some I had NEVER heard of; I just wish I had taken better notes and written down which species I saw that I wanted to do more research on when I got home. Oh well, I will be back – Ohio is the only state to exhibit my favorite animal, the manatee, outside of its native Florida, and we are blessed to have not one, but TWO zoos (Cincinnati and Columbus) that exhibit this beautiful creature – so yeah, I will be back downstate to get my manatee fix. Cincinnati has two manatees that arrived from Florida just a few months ago, and they are relatively young creatures – just 3 and 4-years old. Manatees can live to be 60-70 years old, so the manatees at the Cincinnati Zoo were relatively small compared to the others I've seen in captivity. No less breathtaking, the little guys did move a little bit faster and seemed more playful than their adult counterparts. I knew about the 'Sleep With the Manatees' program that Cincinnati offers before this visit, but I was reminded again – that is of

course something I would love to do. But “Sleep with the Manatees’? I think I’d probably have to call it something different since I wouldn’t be doing much sleeping if I got to spend the night in the manatee exhibit! Someday...

Another remarkable, highly endangered creature housed by the Cincinnati Zoo is the [Sumatran Rhino](#). There are five rhino sub-species left on this planet, and the Sumatran is the most rare – estimated at less than 275 individuals left in the wild. A Sumatran Rhino successfully gave birth at the Calcutta Zoo in 1889, but as decades passed without any further successful reproduction in captivity, people grew concerned and developed a program designed to save the Sumatran Rhino. Widely considered a failure, the program ran from 1984-1996 and consisted of capturing 40 wild Sumatran Rhinos and trying to reproduce them in captivity. By the late ’90s, no rhinos had been born of the program, and half of the captured rhinos had died. In 1997, the United States was down to only 3 captive Sumatran Rhinos: two females (in the Los Angeles Zoo and Bronx Zoo) and one male (Cincinnati Zoo). It was decided that the animals be united for one last breeding attempt in Cincinnati. In September 2001, the first captive-born Sumatran Rhino calf in 112 years was born (this was the 6th pregnancy for the mother; the previous 5 pregnancies were not successful)! Another calf followed in 2004, but sadly that same year a disease outbreak killed all of the Sumatran Rhinos in captivity in Malaysia, reducing the number of captive Sumatran Rhinos in the world to **only eight**. Another calf was born in 2007, and that same year the calf who was born in 2001 was returned to Sumatra to try to breed him there. If you are not an animal lover like I am, then you might find my little rant about the Sumatran Rhino boring, and I apologize. But there aren’t words for how fascinating it was to see an live animal walking around and making noise who is so rare in our world. Although this particular rhino species is the smallest of the 5 currently in existence, it is fascinating in other ways; such as its light coat of reddish-brown hair, its almost

constant vocalizations (which we were able to witness), and its ability to twist saplings into patterns to communicate with other rhinos in the wild. A truly fascinating creature; if you are going to be in the Cincinnati area, I highly recommend stopping by the zoo and glimpsing this historic animal specimen. Here is a video of Emi's 3rd and final calf who was born in 2007:

We stopped for lunch and took in one of those 4D shows; which was alright – being in the air-conditioned theater for 30 minutes was worth the admission fee alone. The 4D consisted of a 3D movie of animals with some additional effects – water spraying, high-powered fans blowing (Ahhh...), things to poke your back, etc. The air blasters on my seat were not working, and neither were my feet ticklers, but no matter, for the air blasting sound in my ears is not one of my favorite things anyway.

By the time we got around to the other side of the zoo, I was so hot and tired that I was becoming willing to skip certain parts of the zoo. We did stop in the petting zoo, another one of my usual favorites (I know a secret spot on goats where they tend to feel sore, and my patented 'goat rubs' are usually very much appreciated... not as much in the heat though).

Two exhibit buildings of note: I really enjoyed the nocturnal house and the cat house (which housed more than just cats, and many species of animals with which I was not familiar – maybe they should change the name – 'Cat House And Friends'? 'Cats and More'? 'Cats, Etc.'? That sounds like the work of the zoo's marketing department; clearly my talents do not lie in that area). The nocturnal house had plenty of species outside of the usual fruit bats you see in the nocturnal houses of many zoos. Along with its share of nocturnal marsupials (a few species of gliders and something called a potto), Cincinnati also has vampire bats (complete with ones feeding out of little dishes of blood – delightfully and creepily fascinating!) as well as flying foxes – bats the size of my large parrot at home with faces resembling foxes or small bears.

Overall, a wonderful day with some great friends, even if it was super hot! Up next, my run-down of the following day spent at King's Island!

One more time around please.

When I see the huge structures of steel or wood, my heart fills with anticipation. The thrill of a Roller Coaster makes me feel years younger. But then my body starts to react in ways it never used to. A queasy feeling enters. I think to myself, that it is only in my head, but more often than not, my stomach shows me who is boss.

The funny thing is that this doesn't usually start on the large coasters. The ones that send the stomach turning are the little ones. It all started with the carnival type rides. The ones that go in circles multiple times. They never fail to turn the motion sickness on.

Even with some medication, the queasy feeling was felt. Not as bad as some times, but the day would need some pacing. But without a line to wait in, pacing was only the distance between two rides. So, I had to sit out a couple of rides. Even with that, I had more rides on roller coasters than I've had in a long, long time.

4 times on the Beast

I think 4 on the Diamondback, but it may have been 3.

1 each on the Racer, Vortex and the Backlot Stunt Coaster. I think I also road the Adventure Express if that was the one with the lame ending. That is a lot of coaster riding in 8 hours (9 hours VIP with 1 hour for lunch). Not to mention 4 times on the White Water canyon ride, once each on Congo Falls and a shoot the rapids ride and bumper cars.

During a normal day at a theme park you can expect to hit 7 or 8 coasters in a 10 to 12 hour day. More if the lines are shorter. I road 11 or 12 times, my tangent's friends road on a

few more coasters than I did. As I said, I needed a break every now and again.

Tour of the Beast was just great and so was the show we caught. I can't say much about the lunch, since I was in no mood to eat.

All of this was great and I would have said it ranks right near the top of my theme park excursions, but there was more. I spent some time with some wonderful people, and that made the two days in Cincinnati grand.

Superman Where Are You Now

It has been years since I have been to [Kings Island](#) (I was in junior high the last time I went). It has changed so much in the many seasons that I remembered only a handful of the attractions and the overall feel has changed A LOT which is a GREAT THING! I loved every minute of it! Maybe because the four of us were V.I.P.s for the day which allowed us to not wait in lines, unlimited drinks throughout the park, a lunch buffet, a photo taken while on a coaster, and \$25 in Beagle Bucks.

I'm not certain that a large number of people know about the V.I.P tour because it seems as if most of the employees were even stymied. Thank goodness for Chase, our 9 hour tour guide who was a blast to have lead us around. One of our group soon became ill and had to sit out a bit from the big thrill rides so Chase so kindly stepped in and rode with me for a while.

Who says work can't be fun?

With the exception of one, all of the rides were amazing! So amazing that it was a toss up between the 31 year old wooden

[BEAST](#) (which we rode at least 4 times IN THE FRONT and once in the middle... YUCK!) and the newer metal, smooth flying [Diamondback](#) that were my favorites. Also high up there were the [Firehawk](#) and [Invertigo](#). I must say that I was pleased that I only caused one ride to stop. Unfortunately, it was Firehawk and C, L, Chase, and I were in our car, flat on our backs, staring up at the sky, inches from the station at the end of the ride. The [Drop Tower](#), while confining and almost caused C and I to feel the need to bail out, was great, too.

The last time I was at the park, the Kiddie Land was devoted to the characters of Hanna-Barbera: The Smurfs, the Flintstones, Scooby-Doo, and the like. Scoobs is still there in the form of an interactive 3D ride in which you shoot monsters and compete with your ride partner. Just beat me by 30 points. Most of the fun for the little ones (like its sister park, Cedar Point) is now devoted to Peanuts characters.

What's a good amusement park on a hot, humid day without a good, soaking water ride? Hand down the best one Kings Island has to offer is White Water Canyon. Funny, but I do not remember the cannons that onlookers can fire at the rafts along the way. One of the female operators along the way got me on purpose and yelled that she liked my Superman tshirt.

THANKS! Another curious thing... Chase informed us that we were one of the few V.I.P. groups to even want to ride water attractions. We rode White Water Canyon 4 times. Two times in a row each time.

Another old favorite was the Racer. It used to have one blue train and one red train that raced each other along the track.

One train used to go backward but eventually went forward. Must not be as popular as it once was because only one train was running. While on the Racer, I forgot to take my Superman hat off my head... Bye, Bye Man of Steel.

Another highlight was the behind the scenes tour of the Beast

given by Don... who holds the record for most rides on the Racer and also named the Diamondback coaster.

After releasing our exCELLENT guide... THANK YOU CHASE! we wanted to stay until the park closed to ride the Beast at dark but Mother Nature had other ideas. Shortly after Chase left us at 7, it began to rain so it was off to use our Snoopy Bucks. I replaced my Superman cap with a Kings Island one and bought a Snoopy tshirt "I Can Do That."

We also took in a great show "Way Too Much TV" which showcased the themes from favorite tv shows of the 50s-90s. Even the lyrics to the themes of Bewitched and I Love Lucy were sung. I got to play theme song trivia before the show began and got a Way Too Much TV button as a prize!

On the way home, I was given the opportunity to eat at a White Castle for the first time ever. It was really not as bad as I have heard some people say (I don't know where those family members would know from because there are none in our immediate area). And I didn't notice any of the lingering effects of the Sliders as I made my way home at 12.30AM.

Thank you Chase! Had A GREAT DAY! And thanks to C & [L](#) for another great time! I am way too spoiled with all this no line theme park fun!

VIPs For A Day (part three of... well, I'll try to make

this the last part)

If you've read my first two blog posts about our trip to King's Island, then you know that I've rambled and chronicled, and now I'm blue in the face and ready to move on. I would like to rate most of their rides though for those who are curious and/or contemplating a visit to the theme park. Somewhere there is a Discovery Channel show about the 10 Most Extreme Roller Coasters I'd like to see – I hear King's Island has 3 or more on the list! Going to hope that it's on youtube... If you haven't read my previous post, here is my ride experience scale: 1♦ = not so good, while 5 ♦ = awesome!

The Racer – 3♦. A wooden racing roller coaster that doesn't really race. According to our guide, people on the different racing trains would trash-talk each other so much that they built a wall to separate the two train colors. When we rode, the first time the blue train was not operating, and the second time, the trains did not go at the same time. Still a fun wooden coaster though!

Flight Deck – 1♦. Formerly called Top Gun, but whatever you call it, we did not like it. It's a roller coaster whose car is suspended from the track above the car, which basically amounted to a lot of swinging. Ok for me, not my favorite, but it made my husband sick.

Vortex – $\frac{1}{4}$ ♦ – This one only gets a quarter star to put it on the map – my map key didn't exactly contain a zero, so let's give it a quarter star just because it's a coaster. But otherwise, yuck. Jerky, but without any real thrills. Reminds me of the Shockwave they used to have at Six Flags Great America in Gurnee Illinois. Funny how I used to ride that over and over, especially near park closing when it would empty out. We would just stay on Shockwave until they kicked us off! But as an adult, the ride type doesn't work for me.

Invertigo – 3♦. I need to go back on this one when it isn't lunch time! I think the Flight Deck/Invertigo/haven't had lunch yet combo did me in as I felt a bit queasy after this one. Basically, you go up and through a loop, and do the same thing backwards. The cool thing about this one is that you face other riders, which I actually don't know if that's a cool thing or not – our guide recommended we try sitting on either the front or back of this one so we didn't have to face strangers on the coaster. I did enjoy how this one whizzed through the station though, and like I said, I will have to try it again on a full stomach.

Sponge Bob 3D Ride – 4½♦. I really liked this one! A lot of fun, and much more movement than its counterpart at Universal Studios, the Jimmy Neutron ride. It's a 3D Sponge Bob movie where the seats move as you move about Sponge Bob's world. The scenery is great, and not only is it 3D, but the rider actually gets to move along with the movie. As a bonus, the movie is very funny, and I loved the story!

Whitewater Canyon – 4½♦. You know the type – a large round boat makes it way down a "river", complete with rapids, drops, and waterfalls. I always love this type of ride and much of the fun is riding it with your friends or even strangers trying to see who is going to get the most wet! The day we went, it was an unseasonal 70°, and getting wet wasn't quite as enjoyable as usual. This is actually one of the smaller versions of this type of ride that I've been on, and the boat seated 6 people instead of the usual 8, 10, or 12 as I've seen before. But this version has an added element of fun – friends, family, and people who have ridden the ride can take revenge on riders by putting in a quarter for a chance to launch a water cannon at passing boats. This part is lots of fun, although they need to get the change machine working so more people can squirt! We went on with some kids who didn't get wet enough in their opinion, so they rode again while we kept watch at the water cannons and succeeded in getting them

SOAKED!

Backlot Stunt Coaster – 2♦. Lameness. But remember, I'm used to Universal Studios since we try to trek to Orlando yearly. This has nothing on Universal. But I suppose for younger kids, it could instill a feeling of bravery as they race past exploding police cars. It goes kind of fast up a winding track, which is kind of different, but other than that, the excitement kind of fizzled, and the ride isn't all that long. The brightly colored cars you ride in are super-cute, but does that really matter?

Adventure Express – $1\frac{3}{4}$ ♦. This is also kind of lame, which is alright, not every coaster has to be top thrill. But this one is like Big Thunder Mountain Railroad at Disney, but that is bigger and faster. Adventure Express was going alright until the rider finds himself in a climatic tunnel, climbing a lift past moving robots and everything. Then when you reach the top – nothing. Nada. Literally – the ride ends here. What the ?

Scooby Doo and the Haunted Castle – $4\frac{1}{2}$ ♦. You ride through scenes of Scooby Doo trying to shoot the bad guys with a laser gun attached to your car – cool! Even better, I actually beat my husband on this one! This ride is a lot like Buzz Lightyear at Disney, and I can never even get close to Hubby's score on that one. He must have had an off-ride though, cuz the second time we rode he beat me silly again. Oh well, this ride is awesomely themed. They remembered quite a few of the bad guys from the old Scooby Doo tv show, and there were sound bites galore. The castle looks awesome from the outside, and we even drove a Mystery Machine:



Other fun rides at this park that deserve at least an honorable mention are the railroad (just a standard train ride, but oh-so-relaxing after a huge day of coaster riding!), the Wild Thornberry's River Adventure (kind of a lame log-flume type ride, but still lots of fun), the Eiffel tower (we didn't ride it, but it was gorgeous to look at), and Dodgem (plain ole bumper cars, but when is the last time hubby and I got to ride 'n bump kid-free? I don't even remember!). Because we splurged and got the guided tour, we even had time to catch some shows – an ice show and an 80's review. The ice skaters were pretty good; especially one guy who even did a triple axle! The 80's show was fun, even though many of the performers were incapable of both singing and dancing at the same time. There was a special Michael Jackson tribute, even though he had passed away only a week before our visit. But there were afros, mullets, big bangs, leg warmers, bright colors, even giant Rubik's cubes, and it was fun to sing along to the rockin' 80's tunes. One did get the feeling however, that not one member of the show had any idea of what the '80's was actually like...

So there you have it. I've reviewed and rated the rides I rode and found worth a mention. If you are thinking of visiting, you should know that King's Island also has a huge kids area, and many more rides I didn't mention. We tried to stay away from any rides with a lot of spinning or anything that looked too crazy (especially this one called Delirium):



It looked a little too crazy/dizzy for me; maybe if you go to King's Island, you can try it and let me know what it's like in the comments!

MY First Time

A comment on [Taylhis'](#) blog gave me inspiration for post fodder. My first time riding a coaster took place when I was 10. My family spent a day at Cedar Point with my uncle, aunt, and two cousins. I liked riding rides and had been on several smaller coasters. I remember the Beastie at Kings Island (still there, Lis?). I took my cousin Stacy to ride the Jr. Gemini. However this year, I was too TALL to ride the smaller version. Seeing this, my Uncle Bob challenged me to ride the REAL thing with him. Why not? The line for the double train, much like The Racer, was not long so I did not have to wait a great deal. I still remember having my eyes shut tight after we made the turn and approached the first hill. From what I understand, I also held onto my co-riders hand and squeezed it a little bit too hard. But what a rush! Red and blue racers going up and down hills and then the split at the end when the cars tilt to the side and finally return home. There may be bigger, faster, longer coasters (you can see the [Magnum XL 200](#) which is 20 years old this summer... NO WAY! dwarfing the

classic) but the good old [Gemini](#) is still one of my favorites. That day in 1983, I discovered that I was growing up because I was no longer small enough to go on any of the kiddie rides. No more Kid Arthur's Court for me. But I can ALWAYS ride the Cedar Downs racing horses.

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 – 4½♦ – 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... 3¾♦. 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...