

Florida 2011 – Trip Diary – Part 4

(NOTE – This is part 4/4 of our family's trip diary detailing our vacation to Orlando, FL taken a year ago now. This last installment is quite late, but better late than never, I think!)

Friday, January 21 – Today our house seemed quite empty as our travel companions left and it was just Hubby, me and the kids. We did enjoy a day of family time, beginning with breakfast at... Sizzler. Actually, I don't remember where we ate breakfast. To be honest, I put the Florida trip diary aside for the past few months and now I don't remember where we ate breakfast. I don't remember all of the details of the day, but I have enough treasured vacation memories to know that it was an excellent day spent with my family. We drove over to Downtown Disney to try something different for a change – we had never been there. Downtown Disney has so much to see that we just walked around for a few hours and were entertained without having to spend money. My personal favorite was the amazing Lego store where one can buy just about any type of Lego a heart desires. You can buy the flat building platforms, bricks in any color of the rainbow, minifigs, and there was even a sort of Lego buffet – you can fill a container with all different types of pieces, any kinds you want: basic building blocks, doors, windows, steering wheels, joints, hinges, you name it. There were stations with samples to play with, and I had to exercise some self-control to let the kids play instead of sitting there myself for hours on end. Because this is Florida, there were Lego things to see outside too – little stations with ramps where you can build Lego vehicles and race them, as well as full scale Lego models of people, the London Bridge, and even a large Loch Ness monster in the lake:



It's really a good thing for my family's budget that there is not a Lego store within 100 miles of our house; I could go nuts in there!

We also went to the Rainforest Cafe and a few other stores and restaurants where they had really cool decor for the kids to see. There was a restaurant with huge dinosaurs where we stopped to use the bathroom, and the kids even enjoyed the Little Miss Match shop (a company that sells socks in sets of 3 and none of them match. The store has socks and lots of other stuff that little girls love to accessorize with). It began to rain, so we got on a boat to cross the lagoon to get to the bus. If you are on vacation in the Orlando area and you find yourself with an extra day or some downtime, then I recommend taking a spin on the Disney transportation – especially if you are over-budget on your trip because it's all free. A fair warning that Disney property is so large that riding the buses, boats and monorails can take up a significant part of your day, but it is a fun and FREE way to see the sights of Disney. So we took a bus to the Grand Floridian hotel to catch the monorail, just for fun. Parking at Downtown Disney is free, so we got on Disney grounds without even having to pay parking! We did have to spend a good 45 minutes on the bus though, but by now it was pouring, so we didn't mind too much. Besides, Hubby surprised me on the bus when he presented me with a Severus Snape minifig that he had picked up as a surprise without me seeing when we were

at the Lego store!! I could not even tell him that Snape is my favorite Harry Potter character because he would have wanted to know why – I didn't want to spoil the last Harry Potter movie for him when it wasn't out yet at that time.

At the Grand Floridian, I had to take some kids to the bathroom, and while I was in there, Hubby got a last minute great deal on a character dinner for us! So we enjoyed dinner with Cinderella, her prince, her step-sisters and her step-mother. The food was wonderful, and the kids loved meeting the characters as they walked around to greet tables. After that, we made our way back to our car, and we were exhausted... I think we called it a night – I'm not really sure; it's taken me so long to finish this trip diary that my memory has faded. All I know is it was a really great day, and a super way to end a wonderful vacation – SO WISH we could go back this year!

Saturday, January 22, 2011 – On this day I know we began to make our way back to Ohio, but I don't remember the details. I think we had told the kids we were going to do some souvenir shopping, but we ran out of time and just wanted to hit the road. Then we had an idea – there are Cracker Barrel restaurants lined up along the expressway all the way home, so we found one on the GPS and got there just before it closed. Cracker Barrels have little stores in them, and the one we stopped at (in Georgia) had a great sale going on. The kids were able to shop and had fun getting some great deals – it was a nice way to add a little more fun to our trip. We arrived home very early Sunday morning, if I'm not mistaken, and probably slept all day and unpacked. SUPER trip that made awesome memories – can't wait to do it again someday, I hope!!

Disney World Fairy Tales (Not Quite)

I came across a really fun article awhile ago called: Confessions Of A Disney Cast Member. The article was written by a guy who spent 5 summers working at the Walt Disney World resort as a Disney cast member. If you're like me and a frequent visitor to the Magic Kingdom, then you will appreciate the following not-so-tall-tales. Even if you've never been to WDW, the following stories are fun to read. Among the entertaining stories he has to share:

Excuse me man, are you pregnant?

What's more terrifying than the 38-foot drop on Disney's Big Thunder Mountain Railroad? Having to ask women in line if they're pregnant. It's for their own safety, but forget a woman scorned—hell hath no fury like a woman who's been mistaken for being pregnant. Once, when I was in training, I watched a coworker approach a larger female park visitor and ask, "Excuse me, ma'am, but are you pregnant?" "Pregnant!?!!" the woman screamed, her voice turning heads at the happiest place on earth. "No! What are you saying? Do I look fat to you?!" She turned to her friend and screamed some more: "They think I look fat. Let's get out of here!" I was so traumatized by that incident I crafted a plan to avoid offending anyone. Whenever I spotted a "suspect," I asked everybody in the vicinity—including teenage boys and women in their 70s—if they were with child. If the woman I suspected was actually pregnant, she left the ride quickly. If she wasn't, she just thought I was working a gag.

I sure am Randy today.

Disney made the "first name" name tag famous, but the tag doesn't always match the person wearing it. One day, as I was steering the raft to Tom Sawyer Island, my name tag dropped

into the river, forcing me to get a new one. There wasn't a single "Robert" left, so until a replacement could be made, I pretended to be "Randy," a name that amused visitors from the U.K. to no end. Elderly English ladies lined up to have their picture taken with me. One screamed when she saw me, grabbed her friend, and yelled, "Is that really your name?" Being a good Disney cast member, I lied and said yes. The friend said, "You know, we love a good randy man back home." But lady, even I'm not that good a cast member.

To get onstage, dress the part.

A few attractions choose audience volunteers to be part of the show, but the selection process is far from random. Typically, you need to be a certain gender, size, and age for each of the different roles. You might even need to be wearing a specific item of clothing. On my off days from work, I used to go over to Universal Studios, and I would get picked all the time to play "Mother" in the old Alfred Hitchcock show. They needed a guy my height and weight who happened to be wearing the same type of plain white tennis shoes I always wore. Also helpful for getting picked: cuteness and enthusiasm. Curious kids who ask nicely and look excited often get extra attention, along with thrilling perks like riding up front and introducing shows.

Stroller relocation program

Disney's a family place, but the people who work there come to loathe strollers. It's part of a cast member's job to keep strollers in nice, orderly lines and to make sure they're only left in designated areas. But park visitors keep their strollers in an appalling condition, loaded up with dirty diapers, rotting bottles of milk, and half-eaten PB&J sandwiches. Others see no problem with parking their strollers right in front of an attraction's exit or entrance. Sometimes thoughtless individuals like this incur the wrath of the stroller police, and their precious Bugaboos and

Maclarens are intentionally relocated to a place “far, far away”—at the very back of the area cordoned off for strollers.



Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of (confiscated) rum
On special Grad Nites, when Disney hosts loads of freshly graduated high school kids, the park puts extra staffers inside Pirates of the Caribbean and other rides as lookouts to monitor less-than-legal activities. Our focus was mostly on what the kids were consuming. Booze, cigarettes—you name it, and a Disney cast member has confiscated it from a 17-year-old at one time or another. One clever kid, forced to hand over his bottle, noted the irony of getting busted in the middle of a ride that celebrates a drunken pirate orgy. “Hey, don’t the pirates have enough?” he asked. “They need mine, too?”

Please keep your happiness to yourself.
This attraction has been camera monitored for your safety. That’s the spiel Disney broadcasts over its loudspeakers for many rides. But the cameras are also meant to protect you from yourself. One night, while most parkgoers were watching the fireworks display, a couple strolled over to Pirates of the Caribbean, where I was working. They not only had a boat to themselves, but empty boats all around them. The real fireworks display, it turned out, was visible on the security cameras to all of us working that night. Let’s just say the show the couple put on wasn’t exactly G-rated.

If you enjoyed the above stories, you might want to [read the article in its entirety here](#), along with other theme park insider info.

Eric And The Beast On A Rag

I did get to sit in the audience of the City Band Wednesday night. I wasn't sure if it was going to be at the bandstand or at its alternate venue. Before finding that out, I decided to locate the place of my Thursday afternoon voice lesson which was easier to locate than the directions given by my new coach. I googled the address and it was a breeze to find.

Especially with the number written on the mailbox. The house was buried by a wooded area but really easy to find. All I had to do was turn off of U.S. 6 onto County Road 13 and it was .3 miles away. Then, with plenty of time to spare, I went to Wal Mart and ran into some old friends and saw the truck belonging to another but was not able to find him. I must have been on the wrong end of Electronics (or he could have been hiding). ☐

After discovering that the concert would be at the ice rink with five minutes to spare, I decided that given the choice, I would have rather directed Stars and Stripes this week as opposed to last (not complaining, just sayin'). I just think this week's concert had better music. Many songs I was already familiar with... "12th Street Rag" I had sung in choir and played sometime. Of course, a different arrangement than I am accustomed to, but I would have enjoyed sitting in the low brass section playing "Selections from *Phantom of the Opera*" and the title tune from the animated classic turned hit Broadway show "*Beauty and the Beast*."

Speaking of Phantom, my brother turned to me and stated that the high school at which he serves as the tech advisor will be performing the musical next year. I did not believe him until I looked [on line](#) and discovered that the rights have just indeed become available from R&H productions for high school and amateur productions. There had been “test” runs a few years ago overseen by Lord Lloyd Webber’s Really Useful Group company. But how did the small school get the rights so quickly? Hicksville had better “Got Talent” to pull this off.

I imagine that the rights are probably for a tailored production of the musical.

I asked Liz if they were going to come next week for the announced ice cream social “before and during the concert.” I don’t think she realized where she will be next Wednesday because she didn’t know if they would be or not. Probably not since they will be at Disney World. Maybe they could borrow Aladdin’s magic carpet, Carpet. I’d rather be there when it is not so hot!

A fun concert moved to a different venue to be “safe rather than sorry.”

Disney Vs. Universal – Round 1,642

As a frequent visitor to Orlando Florida, the United States theme park capital, the following news stories caught my eye. Disney World and Universal Studios have been competing in an epic battle for tourists for a few decades now, and as a result, us tourists are the real winners! Check out the two new additions to each park!

[Universal Studios is adding a Harry Potter-themed world!](#) I'm not even a fan of the series and the pictures and descriptions of this place excited me! I might have to read a Harry Potter book or see some of the movies before I check it out! This answers the question I posed in a previous blog post – What will happen to Marvel Superhero Island when Disney buys Marvel? Answer: who cares? Universal will have the Wizarding World of Harry Potter!

Not to be outdone, Disney has released that they are doubling the size of their current Fantasyland area, adding a Little Mermaid attraction, among other things. If the rumors on [this blog](#) are true, it seems to me like Universal is going to win this time. More meet-and-greet space at Disney? Yawn! Bring on the thrill rides! But if I know the folks at Disney, they have more than doubling Dumbo and adding more Disney princess meet-and-greet up their sleeves and just haven't leaked that part of the expansion to the public yet... So stay tuned!

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.

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.

Down And Out In The Magic Kingdom

I was doing a search in the library’s database, and I came across the title *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* by Cory Doctorow. Further investigation showed it to be a science fiction book about Walt Disney World in the future. Not usually my type of novel (and I strongly prefer to read non-fiction anyway), but since we’re Disney affectionados, I couldn’t resist the read. It took me over a month to read it, and that’s not even solely because I’m so busy. The book is difficult to read – author Doctorow does a nice job at placing the reader in the characters’ futuristic universe, but it’s almost too much – he neglects to provide an explanation of certain things. For instance, the characters all have “Whuffie” and “HUDs”, and these concepts are constantly revisited throughout the story, but it’s never explained

exactly what these things are! My interpretation is that Whuffie refers to a meter in one's body that measures a person's positive characteristics, experiences, and emotions – and others can see your Whuffie level. A person with low Whuffie is shunned in society, and sometimes even denied entrance to Disney World. HUDs seem to be a person's computer – it almost seems to be a part of their brain. They can look up stuff and send things to each other instantly with their HUDs like directions to places. It seems to be kind of like today's internet, yet it's built right into people's brains. So, yeah, you can see why it was slow reading as the reader had to get around all of these unfamiliar concepts. But onto the story itself...

In the future when *Down and Out...* is set – and I don't know what year that is, he never specifically says – Disney World is now a retro-park; something that is preserved only because it's an example of the great works of our current time. The main character, Julius and his girlfriend Lil (who was raised in the Magic Kingdom) are on a mission to save the Magic Kingdom and keep the attractions as they are: old-fashioned rides through vintage dioramas. There is a group of people trying to "rehab" all the rides and give them a futuristic makeover, and they do get ahold of the Hall of Presidents – they make it so that the guests can actually see what it *feels* like to be Abraham Lincoln and the rest of the former Presidents. It is the goal of Julius, Lil, and their friend Dan to keep the rest of Liberty Square (a section of the Magic Kingdom), especially the Haunted Mansion, away from the "ad-hocs" as the rehabbing group is called. Throw in Julius' murder (don't worry, he's been "backed up" and can reclaim his life in a clone) and the fact that he now has to find out who killed him and keep it from happening again, and that's how the plot thickens.

Overall, it was a very interesting read, but probably not something I'd re-read. It was worth stepping out of my usual

non-fiction genre for the experience to read a science-fiction tale, but it wasn't anything stupendous. The story was interesting, and the author did a great job of detailing life in the future, even if it was at times confusing to the reader. I kept feeling like I was coming in on a sequel having missed the first part. I thought there'd be more details about the Magic Kingdom, and in that respect, I was disappointed. But if you like sci-fi books and you've been to Disney World, I recommend this book only if you read a lot and have lots of spare time. On a grading scale, *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* gets a C- from me. Up next for me is *My Lobotomy* by Howard Dully- a non-fiction book about a guy who was involuntarily given an "ice-pick" lobotomy as a 12-year old.