

I Never Thought About the Crate Being Square and the Turnstile Being Round...

In case you've missed my previous posts about animals and Jack Hanna, let me explain that Jack Hanna is my favorite celebrity and how much I really enjoy following his adventures through zoo life. In case you don't know who Jack is, he is the man who gave Columbus, Ohio a zoo. They did have one before, even though many residents weren't even aware of it, but with Jack's brilliance in zoo management and marketing, the [Columbus Zoo](#) has become one of the most renowned zoos in the world today. These days, Jack spends his time filming tv shows of his own, and also bringing animals around the country for appearances in theaters and on other tv shows, such as David Letterman, Maury Povich, and Good Morning America in order to educate people about respecting animals. Whenever animals are involved, situations can easily become unpredictable. Throw Jack into the mix, and these situations now become hilariously entertaining *and* unpredictable. Things seem to happen to Jack, and if you'd like an example of what I mean, check out the following article detailing an animal mishap Jack encountered at the airport last September:

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) – Animal expert Jack Hanna and an 11-month-old flamingo became trapped while trying to squeeze through an airport security turnstile. It took firefighters to finally get the flamingo out. Animal expert Jack Hanna had a close encounter with a flamingo Sunday. Hanna, the director emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and a frequent guest on nationally televised talk shows, was returning from a zoo fundraiser with a mongoose, a small leopard and the flamingo. Three other people were with them. The entourage arrived at the Ohio State University Airport just after midnight Sunday to find the terminal closed. The only way to leave the tarmac

was through a 10-foot-tall metal turnstile with several horizontal bars – not the easiest exit to squeeze through when you’re traveling with boxed-up animals, Hanna said. **“I never thought about the crate being square and the turnstile being round,”** he said. Hanna, 60, pushed the flamingo’s 2-foot-by-3-foot compartment into the turnstile, then continued pushing while straddling the crate. “I was stuck like a worm. My eyes were as big as grapefruits,” he said. “I can’t describe the feeling in my stomach. I can’t move up or down. The bars are on your face.” Hanna said he eventually squirmed free, leaving the flamingo still wedged inside and everyone else trapped on the tarmac. He then walked to a nearby fire station for help. It took three firefighters to hoist the flamingo’s crate up and out of the turnstile, he said. Columbus fire department logs show the firefighters arrived at the airport at 12:30 a.m. for a “flamingo rescue,” spokeswoman Kelly McGuire said. Hanna joked that the next time he flies through the airport, the biggest animal he’ll bring is a gerbil.

If you were entertained by the preceding article, I highly recommend Jack’s book [Monkeys on the Interstate](#) which details his life before and during his days at the Columbus Zoo – it’s a VERY entertaining and funny read, especially for animal lovers and zoo enthusiasts. I really hope I can schedule some time to catch Jack at one of his appearances soon, but until then, I will keep checking for him on Letterman and will probably check out the book for a fourth time!

Food Chain Gang

I should probably explain where the title of my blog comes from. It’s actually a title I picked out years ago as I was

musings while doing housework one day. I thought, a story about our household should be called, "The Food Chain Gang". At the time, we had a few more pets than we have now, completing the chain. Back then, we were the happy owners of 2 dogs, a cat, a parrot, and a little marsupial (animal with a pouch, like a kangaroo) called a sugar glider. The sugar glider and the cat have since crossed the "Rainbow Bridge" which some people call pet heaven. And, if you're a regular reader, you've read that we've added a new dog to our family in the last month. But the new dog doesn't exactly complete a food chain, so I just felt the need to explain why my blog is called "My Food Chain Gang" even though we are down to 3 dogs and a parrot.

As an animal lover, I would love to add even more pets to our menagerie, however, it's just not practical right now. We have 1 dog with some terrier (terror!) in her, Jack Russell to be exact, and she will "hunt" any kind of small animal we bring into the house. So, my dreams of owning a rat or 2 or 3 will have to wait at least a few years, hopefully more, since the "Jerk" Russell mix is only called that in jest – she is our baby. My husband and I adopted her before we were married and before the kids were born. And before you judge me, do the research – rats actually make very good pets! Unlike many of their rodent cousins; hamsters, gerbils and the like, rats are actually pretty clean, very smart, and they are even friendly and cuddly!

Since I already mentioned wanting a rat, which many people think is a crazy pet, it should be no surprise when I say with sincerity that if I didn't have small children, I would have a pet alligator. Again, a little bit of research will tell you that alligators are almost nothing like (in behavior) their fellow crocodilians. They are actually quite docile and easier to handle than you would think ***if you know what you're doing of course*** – stress that point. I know some about handling alligators, though I've only held small to medium

sized ones, and I have never even owned a reptile, so needless to say, this is not an option for me right now... but maybe someday!

I would also like a tortoise, but with 4 kids, 3 of which will be under the age of 5, I do enough cleaning up around the house as it is – don't need a tank to clean! Plus, we are very lucky to be able to afford some mini-vacations now and then, and any more responsibilities for the pet sitter might put her over the edge ☐

I have always wanted a goat, and now that we live in the country, I can see how easy it is to get one – you can just open up the paper, call a number and buy a goat. But I don't think the neighbors would appreciate what our lawn would look like. Something tells me our quiet residential neighborhood near the heart of the downtown of the city would not be a good place to house a goat.

I would love another cat someday, but I'm allergic. And it all but broke my heart when I lost my beloved cat earlier this year... I felt very guilty that I couldn't really pet her or spend time with her as much as I (and she) wanted because of my allergies.

And talking about cheap farm animals reminds me of another realization I had after moving to the country – baby chicks and ducks are really cute AND very cheep, err inexpensive! But again, our Jerk Russell would just try to eat any kind of animal like that. She STILL likes to hunt the parrot when he flies in the house, even though he's taken a nip at her more than once with his huge beak!

And I would LOVE my own parrot – I've always wanted an African Grey, ever since I was really little and read a wonderful book by the same guy who wrote the movie, "The Water Horse". The author is Dick King-Smith, and his book, "Harry's Mad" is just a wonderful story for kids about a boy and his pet parrot.

But while I'm on the subject of parrots, let me talk for a minute about pets NOT suitable for families. Parrots sure are beautiful animals, and they're lots of fun when they talk, laugh, and imitate, but they are also very moody and unpredictable. Most are not cuddly, and if they are, it's usually only with one person in the household, and they will resent every other person who gets in their way. Which is what happened with our parrot – he has bonded to Daddy, that's his "mate", and the rest of us cannot touch him, OR ELSE we have to deal with the rath of a beak that is strong enough to snap a broomstick in HALF! Parrots are VERY loud – and there is no relief from their noise. Their scream can rattle your eardrum, and is almost always guaranteed to make a small child cry. And, they scream to have fun! It's not just when they are upset or want something, so if you think you'll be able to quiet a screaming parrot, guess again! Luckily, ours is about to celebrate his 7th year with us, so through lots of growing pains, we've learned how to make it work in our house. Parrots can also be very dangerous, so just like any other animal, kids need to have constant supervision around parrots. Overall, as the owner of a parrot, I would HIGHLY recommend another pet choice to anyone with kids in the house.

I wouldn't recommend a sugar glider as a pet either. Ours was "used" – we actually found her at a garage sale – and that is a testament to how often people think it'd be cool to have one of these only to decide later they're too much work. They are intelligent, social animals, so they require lots of attention. However, they are also nocturnal, so you have to be available at night to take them out of their cage to play. Light will actually damage their eyes, so taking them out at night in a specially under-lit room is required. They can be nippy, smelly (they excrete an odor to mark their territory), and can even make loud noises all night that keep you awake. And they require a special diet of fresh fruits and vegetables also, which can be inconvenient and expensive.

So anyway, now that I've recommended all the pets that AREN'T good for families, I would say that the standard dog or cat IS great for families. Obviously, there is a lot to take into consideration when shopping for one of these, and I won't go into that this time... if you really need some good advice about why humane societies are a better choice than pet stores and what to look for while choosing a pet, see my previous post called, "3's a Crowd?".

So, now you know where the title "My Food Chain Gang" came from. Maybe someday, I will add to the chain and have a real zoo to call my own. But for now, I will stick with the gang we have – everybody knows their place in the chain and gets along great!

Been a while

Well, it has been awhile since my last post, so I will have to pick up the pace. I had some insane idea that I would be able to post from my friend's house when I was in Ohio for the last few days. Of course the opportunity to ask really never presented itself. If I was making more money I could have had a laptop with me, but as a poor substitute (no pun intended...) I am still trying to afford a new **desktop** to replace my old 1.1GHz one that stopped working last year. Yes, I use another's computer to do my blogging and other stuff.

Well, Ohio was entertaining, at least when we could decide on something to do. On Thursday I was able to get some use out of my new phone with the camera feature. I have yet to see if any of the pictures actually look any good full scale. Once I transfer them to the computer I will show a couple of them. Anyway, we were at the Toledo Zoo even though it was an

overcast, somewhat rainy day (especially in the late afternoon- we got soaked!). We were one of maybe a dozen families there enjoying the day. Many attractions were closed but for some reason it still cost me the same \$10 it would cost to enter on a bustling summer day. Not all were closed, so we still saw a large number of animals. Again, pictures will follow. At night we watched some Office episodes and split up to go to bed.

The following day was the day of indecision. We went to Defiance (yes, as in The Prizewinner from...) for the day and besides eating and playing some [Highway 66 mini-bowling](#) we did some *shopping* of all things. The bowling was definitely different than the full-scale version, but I was just as bad at it. If nothing else, the shopping was good social time. Speaking of social time, once we got back their friends started arriving shortly after (they were invited- they weren't *those* sort of friends...) and we played a couple of games while the kids watched TV. Finally, after bearing our souls in one of the social games I left for home (about an hour and a half after I wanted to, yes the game was fun) and didn't get home until after 1AM.

At least the traffic was good, even through the city, until I encountered a bottleneck where the expressway was bottled to just one lane. I have no idea what was going on- there were many trucks lined up on the other side of the highway but the side I was on was recently finished road work and so looked excellent. Were they doing a late night inspection to see if the job was done right? Anyway, that only lasted for a couple of miles so after that there were no problems. I quickly got some things unpacked then I got ready for bed, so again, no post.

Today I was busy for much of the day so I am only now finally getting to the blog. Well, time to end this post so hopefully you will get in some happy reading!

Lions and Tigers and Bears Oh My

I am greatly anticipating our scheduled visit to the Toledo Zoo next week. My daughter needs a specialty dentist in the big city, so we've decided to throw some fun in there as well with a trip to the zoo. It will probably be my last one until after I have the baby, unless they have a wagon available for rental that's big enough for very pregnant me AND the 3 kids. Since it's only March and I'm not due until July, I think I can still handle the large amount of walking it takes to get around the zoo – we'll see anyway. I naively thought that pregnancies would get easier with experience, but it seems that I forgot to factor in my increasing age – I am almost 10 years older than I was the first time I was with child – and I feel it!

Toledo Zoo is very large. It's a very nice zoo, but there is lots of walking. It remains one of my favorite zoos in the country however, and I've visited at least 20. Toledo has lots of animals, but they are pretty spread out. Also, because the zoo straddles a major road, you have to trek up and down a ramp and across a long pedestrian bridge; all of which is not so much fun if pregnant or in the heat of the summer. But overall, it is one of my favorite zoos. Even though the gorilla's indoor exhibit is pretty small, I really enjoy how close you can see them, and they don't seem unhappy being in a small exhibit... unlike a gorilla at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska. He had a really small indoor enclosure, and we witnessed him charge at a little boy – it was very scary and thank goodness that glass was thick! This was years ago, and I think Henry Doorly has since re-built their gorilla exhibit. Another zoo with a lot of walking is

the Brookfield Zoo near Chicago, Illinois. Brookfield has lots of walking, but unlike Toledo, the animals are spaced further apart, so much of the walking is without seeing animals. It's been a few years since I've been there, so maybe they've changed this, but it's not one of my favorite zoos, unless we're talking about sentimental reasons – it was the site of my husband's and my first “unofficial” date. One zoo that sticks out in my memory as one of my favorites is the Folsom Children's Zoo in Lincoln, Nebraska. The name is misleading, they had quite an array of animals there; including red pandas, camels, reindeer, leopards, monkeys, a variety of reptiles, seals, sloths, emus that like to be pet, and there are still many more I haven't named. All in only 19 acres, nestled right in the city. Which sounds large, but once you get in there, it was really the perfect size. Not much walking at all, lots of animals who all had lots of room in their environments, and it was very nicely landscaped with mature trees and such so that you forgot you were in the middle of the city. We used to live close enough to walk there, but the only problem with this great little zoo is that it was only open from April – October. If you are ever in Nebraska, the Folsom Children's Zoo is a must-see. Being a native Chicagoan, it's strange that I've never visited the Lincoln Park Zoo, which is also in the middle of a city, albeit a much larger one than Lincoln. But I've heard good things about it, and maybe one of these days, during one of our bi-yearly visits to the area, we will give Lincoln Park a whirl so I can add it to my zoo resume.

Before our trips to the zoo, I like to visit a really cool website to brush up on my animal facts. It really makes zoo trips more interesting if you know a little more about what you're looking at. Check out this online database that is maintained by the University of Michigan:
<https://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/index.html>

And finally, if you are still reading this, you must be an

animal lover like me. If you also like to read, I highly recommend my favorite book written by my favorite celebrity: Jack Hanna, called "Monkeys on the Interstate". If you ever watch The Late Show with David Letterman, you know that poor Jack often comes across as a bumbling fool when he's on the show. He is an animal expert however, and he is much more entertaining to watch than most animal experts. He and Letterman tease each other mercilessly, and there is almost always some sort of animal mishap that occurs when Jack is involved, always with hilarious results. His book is a narrative of the same sort of episodes, all taken from his life as he was growing up and also from when he went on to become the director of the Columbus Zoo. By the way, being an Ohioan, I've had the opportunity to visit the Columbus Zoo, and I will say that it did not disappoint. If you read Jack's book, you will read about how he brought the zoo from anonymity (he notes in his book that when he first arrived in Ohio, people would always ask him, "there's a zoo in Columbus?!?") to one of the most renowned facilities in the world. There was a lot of trial and error involved in achieving this, and again, many hilarious hijinks, all of which are detailed in the book – it is really entertaining reading. And it's not just a clever title – there really *were* Monkeys on the Interstate, thanks to Jack and one of his hare-brained ideas! Maybe I will take another look at it on the long ride to Toledo next week...