

# **EVEN BETTER THAN I IMAGINED!!!**

We are back from Illinois; actually we got back a few days ago, but things here have been so non-stop that I'm not even unpacked from the weekend trip yet – working on that this week. But I had to take a break and write about the super fun Jack Hanna show that we were able to see while in Illinois – after all my anticipating, it was somehow **even better than I had imagined!!!**

We were the first ones to arrive at Aurora's Paramount Theater (a lovely old-fashioned theater with beautiful architecture – in fact, it was chosen to be the setting for a few scenes of the Johnny Depp movie about the mobster John Dillinger called Public Enemies that was recently released), so we opted to stand in line rather than wait at the bar. This way, we were first upstairs for our "Jamboree Lunch" and got first pick of our seats. Seeing as how there were only two ways that Jack could get up to the second floor – stairs or elevator – we chose the table nearest both entrances. We went to go pick up our lunch – peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cookies, fruit snacks, and chips situated in a safari hat – and came back to our table which had a bunch of little animal toys on it: lion rulers, a finger puppet zebra, coloring pages, and a parachuting tiger (oh how tempting it was to let him loose over the railing to sail down into the lobby... but Jack was due to arrive, so we were on our best behavior). Once we saw that all of the kids at the event were going to be seated elsewhere, I scooped up all of the jungle paraphernalia and put it in my purse. We put on our safari hats and ate our PB & J – did I mention that this event was designed for kids? Had we known before we got there, we would have brought our kids, but it wasn't very well organized and so we didn't really realize it until we got there – oh well. All was

forgotten once Jack Hanna arrived!! If you don't know who Jack Hanna is, here is a brief synopsis: Jack Hanna is an animal guy, and he was the director of the now world famous Columbus Zoo from 1978-1992. In that time, he put that zoo on the map; it went from being a place that even locals didn't know existed to a world renowned animal facility, and attendance at the zoo increased by 400%! He now travels the world visiting endangered species, zoos, and making live show and tv show appearances (his monthly appearances on David Letterman's show are always entertaining!!), all in the name of bringing awareness to wildlife conservation.

So anyway, at the Jungle Jamboree lunch, Jack goes from table to table (preceded by a woman carrying a baby wallaby in a pouch and a man with a fox), and he comes to our table first!! He had limited time at each table of course, but he autographed a little picture of himself, and we did have time to tell him how we saw him at Sea World on our honeymoon in 1999. He asked if we liked animals, and my response went something like this: "Duh, huh huh huh". As much as I had been thinking about what to say to Jack, it happened to me again. When I finally met him, I was dumbfounded and couldn't think about the most important things to talk about in such a little time. No matter; we would be meeting him AGAIN later that same day!!

So after that, we went back downstairs to the merchandise table, and Hubby bought me Jack's new book (My Wild Life – it's kind of a re-write / update to my favorite book, Monkeys on the Interstate. But I didn't have this new book yet, and needless to say now that I have it, my reading of the Harry Potter series has taken a backseat!), and we waited for Jack to finish at the lunch tables upstairs. He came downstairs, there was just a few minutes wait, and then we met him AGAIN and he signed my new book, plus ALL of the books of his that I had brought along – and I had a huge purse full. We explained to him that he is our favorite celebrity ("Oh, I'm not a

celebrity!" he said.), and the nice guy behind us took this picture (note that Hubby still has on his safari hat!):



Not sure what to do with ourselves after our autograph session, we were SO tempted to get back in line. After all, Jack Hanna, our favorite ~~celebrity~~ animal conservation personality was sitting within 10 feet of us! But we wanted to give other people a chance to meet him, and I'm glad we chose to just stand there and gawk at him from the sidelines for 25 minutes rather than getting back in line – turns out that some people didn't get a chance to get his autograph since he was whisked away to get ready for the stage show. It just wouldn't have been fair for us to be in the line twice. He announced later that people who didn't get a chance to get his autograph could just email his website and an autographed pic would be sent out. No offense, Jack, but that's just not the same as meeting you in person! I am SO thankful that we got to meet him, and he is even more humble and down-to-earth than he seems on tv!!

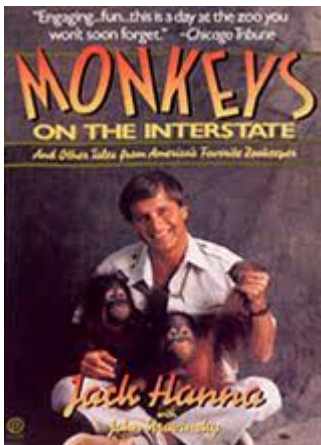
Well, this blog post got lengthy, and I haven't even talked about the stage show yet, so I think I will cut this into multiple posts as my little guy is finished with his 'quiet time'. Unfortunately for me (and my ever-growing list of housework), my 2-year-old has outgrown his naps so I don't have nearly as much free time during the day as I need to get everything done. So you'll have to wait until my next post (or two or three) to read about the actual Jack Hanna stage

show (best show I've EVER seen!!!) and the other stuff we crammed into our jam-packed super-fun Illinois weekend. Until then...

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## Jack Hanna!!!

While my girls are counting down the days until they get to go to their Grandma's house, I am counting the days until I get to see a LIVE JACK HANNA SHOW!!! Don't get me wrong, I'm really excited to see family too, but I've been waiting to see a live Jack Hanna show for over a decade!!!



I've had the show tickets in the car for about two weeks now, since I was so sure that I'd forget them. I've already packed my glasses too, so I can actually see Jack and the animals from my seat. And I've been "cramming" all week – trying to quickly re-read my favorite book, Jack Hanna's *Monkeys on the Interstate*. If all goes well, I should be finished with it by Saturday when I see Jack. Because we have tickets for a pre-show event called a Jamboree Lunch, I'm hoping for maybe an autograph or even an opportunity to chat with Mr. Hanna! I know it's a shot in the dark, but I've made a mental list of things I'd bring up just in case; many of them are from the *Monkeys* book. Even if I don't get an opportunity to talk to

Mr. Hanna, I am ecstatic just to be able to see his show!!! I really enjoy his appearances on Letterman every month, and I'm beyond excited to see Mr. Hanna live!! Just in case, I'm bringing an array of my Hanna collection in case I get a chance to seek an autograph, but I'm not expecting it or anything – don't want to be disappointed. It would be nice, however, to replace our autographed Jack Hanna honeymoon memento. Now I have to tell that story...

When my husband and I took our honeymoon to Florida in 1999, we were driving from where we lived in Illinois to Florida (which is a very LONG drive... but for some reason, I cannot remember exactly what it was like to do that WITHOUT KIDS along...), and we were talking about all the things we would do. One of the things that came up was celebrities we would like to run into, and Jack Hanna was the only one we both decided we would really care about running into. Once in Florida, we visited Sea World, and we were going to go into the underwater viewing area for the dolphins, but it was roped off – “TV show taping in progress”. Just before we turned away to head to something else, a worker lifted the ropes, so in we went, and the crew was packing up the cameras, and THERE WAS JACK HANNA!!! And we were all alone since the area had just been closed off – no mob of fans to compete with. Ok, so maybe Jack Hanna isn't the type of celebrity to have fans mobbing him wherever he goes, but to me, he is an animal hero. His *Monkeys on the Interstate* book chronicles his creativity, his strength through adversity, and his triumphs (and failures!) he went through as he was building the once unheard of Columbus Zoo into the world famous, state-of-the-art zoo facility it is today – a fascinating read for anyone who loves animals, zoos, Jack Hanna, or who just likes funny stories!! Jack Hanna is a marketing and animal genius! But I digress – back to my story...

So we got to meet Jack Hanna, right there at Sea World. I was not expecting it, so I gummed up and let my husband do the

talking, and Jack whipped out an 8×10 glossy picture and autographed it, putting our names on it and everything. Unfortunately, this picture was one of a few irreplaceable items that were entrusted to so-called “friends” during a move we had, never to be seen again... but that’s another story and nothing I want to dwell upon now.

So yeah, IF I actually get to talk to Jack again this time, I have my list of things I want to talk about... though it’s quite lengthy, and my brain will be swimming with basically EVERYTHING from the *Monkeys on the Interstate* book, as well as things I want to know about starting my own zoo – hey, that shouldn’t come as a big surprise to any of my readers, so lift your dropped jaw. Those of you who know me realize that I have a pretty good start on one already, don’t you? ☐



*This is Jack at one of his Letterman appearances. Each of his appearances on Letterman has moments of hilarity as Jack tries so hard to get in his animal facts while Letterman is busy making jokes and heckling him. After decades of monthly appearances, the two have built a relationship of sorts, and Jack now brings animals that sometimes shock, awe, and even scare Letterman!! Never a dull moment when Jack’s around..*

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# The Office – Season 7!!

I am behind on blogging about my favorite tv show (and the only one that's left that is good enough for me to watch these days!), The Office! Time flew so fast that the season premiere was a few weeks ago now, and it's been a great season so far!

The Office is on Season 7 already, and unfortunately for us fans, this is reportedly the last season for the show's lead actor, Steve Carell. As a huge fan of the show, I personally don't see how it will work without Carell's lovable idiot boss character, Michael Scott, and I'm hoping that he will change his mind about leaving. Although he has yet to win an Emmy for his performance as Michael Scott (darn Alec Baldwin on 30 Rock takes it every year!), episode 2 of season 7 of The Office saw the best performance I've ever seen Carell give and probably the best acting I've ever seen on a tv sitcom! If you're a fan, I'm talking about the scene where he is in a counseling session with Toby, and Toby is kind of manipulating him to actually talk to him. For a few minutes, Michael is actually talking and playing cards with Toby – a man he simply cannot stand. He even has an "I loathe Toby" face that is priceless. So anyway, he's playing cards with Toby, and Toby is actually making some valuable psychiatric headway with Michael... until Michael realizes it. Within seconds as he's realizing what Toby has done, his transformation back into his "I loathe Toby" mode is just... WOW. Emmy-worthy material, for sure in my opinion, but only time will tell.

Unfortunately, if you are not already watching this great show, then I can't recommend you start now in the 7th season – nowadays the show seems to be written for its fan base, and newcomers might not be able to follow the plots which are seemingly being developed around the already established characters. But I do highly recommend you check out the show beginning in Season 1 – you can do this on dvd or perhaps even

on NBC's website? That way, you can watch the The Office characters hilariously evolve yourself. If you work in an office yourself, are looking for a new tv show to watch, or are simply a fan of good tv, talented script-writing, try The Office!!

I cannot wait to see what the 3rd episode of this new season will bring us on Thursday!!

One of the Michael Scott's (aka Steve Carell's) famous "I loathe Toby" faces:



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## Fun On The Farm

I think most people have fond memories of visiting a special family fun place in the fall. The pumpkin farms that my husband and I grew up going to are much different now – his has closed down, and mine has expanded beyond the family-owned small operation into a little carnival of sorts; I visited a few years ago. It was fun, but not the same. We've since moved away from the place of our youth, and we are happy to have found a fun place in NW Ohio to make memories with our own kids: [Leader's Family Farms](#).

Leader's has something for every age group: 2 haunted attractions for the older crowd, and for the family: mini-



golf, a petting zoo (complete with exotics – more on that later!), hayrides, a hay maze, slides, chicken coop shooting, and a corn maze. For the little ones, there are bouncy castles, a moo-train, a hay-climber with tunnel, and a corn box. The under 5 kids area is really fun, and it's all free! My 2-year-old and my 3-year-old had a blast over there for hours, even if my son came home with a diaper full of corn – it was worth it! Actually, he still had corn coming out of his coat the next morning at church but again, it was well worth it! Here is a video of him playing in the corn box in case you're wondering what I'm talking about. The video pans to the rest of my kids, and finishes with my 3-year-old crawling through the little kids' tunnel:

My husband took my two oldest girls and their friend into the haunted corn maze. This was a big deal because this thing is SCARY! It is the best (read: scariest) haunted house in the area, and my daughter's friend wanted to go in it, so we convinced our daughter to go as well (they're both 10). Thrill-seeker little sis (age 6) really wanted to check it out, so she went too. They might have been REALLY scared, but they all made it out, and no one cried or tried to back out at the last minute! I wish I could have seen them in there, but the little ones were WAY too young for something like that, so I stayed out with them. I didn't mind too much since the exotic petting zoo was free – I hung out there for the hour and a half or so that it took my family to get through the haunted house. They had goats, sheep, alpacas, a teeny-tiny little pig, a camel (just a fuzzy baby, not his full height even though he was taller than I... I was wondering how old he was, and I found out he shares a February birthday with a fellow tangenteer...), and some kangaroos. They also had some other baby animals (a fox for one) and some parrots, but they could not bring them out because the weather was terrible – windy, cold, and rainy. But I got to pet some kangaroos and even feed them – I think it was the first time I've ever touched a kangaroo! They were good-tempered, soft, and really interesting to see up close and personal. I think the petting zoo people got sick of me, and I would have hung out more by the country band which I also liked, except that the weather was so terrible that it was hard to even enjoy the band – we all just wanted to stay out of the wind and rain. Look how little this pig is:

And here is more of the kangaroos and of the camel:

The hayride goes out way back into the forest, and luckily we rode it in between rain showers. The tractor even drove through a small creek bed that was partially filled – it looked like we were going to get stuck in the water:

My kids all liked it, even if there were some concerns about tipping on the steep hills going down into the forest – but we didn't tip. I can't wait to take my son on the hayride in our town in a few weeks -there are spooks that jump out from behind the trees there, and given his fascination with monsters lately, I know he'll have a blast! I brought out the Halloween costumes last night for the kids to pick through to find what they're going to be for Halloween, and my son found a Friday the 13th Jason hockey mask and insisted on going to bed with it. ☐

I must also add that Leader's is a family-owned farm; we struck up several conversations with the owners, and they are extremely nice and caring for their customers. The farm opened a little late when we visited because of the rain, so they gave us free passes to come back again – as busy as our Octobers are (this one being no exception), I think going back to Leader's when the weather is better is a MUST!! By the way, I was *this close* to taking home a straggler from the petting zoo. Only time will tell if I am able to resist next time we visit... ☐

My men on the hayride:



And my girls... note the beautiful NW Ohio countryside in the background. The scenery will only get better as the leaves change a little more and the sun comes out:



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## Meet Marty

Question: What's the best way to dislodge me from a "case of the Mondays"?

Answer: A surprise trip to the zoo on a work day, of course! Hubby knows me so well ☐

Tangent: If you have your own "case of the Mondays", rent the movie Office Space – it's hilarious!

So we took off Monday for the zoo, and we were torn between which side of the zoo to visit – Toledo Zoo straddles a major highway, the Anthony Wayne Trail, and we never visit both sides in the same day because it adds a TON of walking, much of it up long ramps pushing a heavy double stroller. We usually park in the back and opt for the larger side of the zoo, but we have been visiting a lot lately, and since it was a work day and Hubby had to get home at a somewhat decent hour to get back to work, we opted for the smaller side of the zoo. This side might not have many exhibits, but there is this almost-year-old baby polar bear that I've been wanting to see, so it seemed like the right choice – until we saw the sign at the gate that read, "Our baby polar bear, Siku, will

not be on exhibit today.” WHAT?!? Well, we had already parked, unloaded kids, and walked into the zoo, so visiting the other side was no longer an option. We trudged on, determined to make the best of it.

And lucky us, it all worked out wonderfully! We may not have gotten to see a super-cute baby polar bear, but we got to see a full-grown male polar bear up close, nose to nose – I’m talking within inches. Sure, there was a pane of glass separating us from the polar bear, but that’s a given – look at this:

In case you're wondering, Marty the polar bear (Siku the cub's dad) has a bucket containing frozen fish in an ice block. We watched him conquer the first bucket and devour the fish, and then he bullied the 2nd bucket away from the other polar bear and worked on it for a good 30-40 minutes – we had to leave before he got to the fish from the 2nd bucket. I could not decide which video was best, so I'm just going to post all 4 – they're all under a minute long anyway so they don't take forever to unload off my camera. All of the videos were taken while Marty was working on the 2nd ice bucket. You can see how he dips the bucket in the water and even dives into the water with the bucket in his mouth in order to let the water loosen up the fish ice block for him.







In case you're wondering, being up close and personal with a thousand pounds of polar bear (give or take a few hundred pounds) is really as amazing as it looks!!!

And my two little ones had a great time also – at first my son was afraid of the polar bear, but he got over that once he realized that Marty was much more interested in his bucket than some zoo visitors. Here are the kids posing in an “arctic cave”:



And the kids' favorite part of the day? Climbing on and posing on this mock dung heap near the giraffe exhibit. Kids – gotta love 'em!



# Dropping Like Flies

It's been really difficult to blog with a 2-year-old in the house, especially because mine is a boy. He just seems to get into anything and everything, and this phase of his is lasting longer (and is much much messier and harder on my house) than was any of his 3 sisters' terrible twos. Complicating my schedule is the fact that he seems to be growing out of his naps, so now Mom's daily time-out has been reduced to mere hopefulness for a time-out.

So anyway, this explains my blogging absence, and now you know why it's taken me so long to blog that...

My 6-year-old daughter Samantha lost her first tooth last week!

She was SO excited, and of course the tooth fairy made her nighttime visit. You might have read that I've been teaching 1st grade Sunday school (which just happens to be Sammie's class), and that's been going very well – I really enjoy it. Sammie's lost tooth prompted me to ask last Sunday how many of my students have lost teeth, and they were all full of stories. One little girl (who is missing her two front teeth) told about how she lost *this* one and *that* one in the same day – and she was pointing to her missing bottom teeth, not even the top two that were visibly missing! So it seems that Sammie is just beginning – she has lots of teeth to lose, and because teeth seem to drop out of 1st graders' mouths constantly (dropping like flies? That doesn't sound quite right now that I think about it), it makes me think that I had better bring a little container or two with me every Sunday just in case I need to send a fallen tooth home with its owner.

What an exciting time in a kid's life, and it was neat to hear how enthusiastically all my first graders talked about losing

their teeth and getting visits from the tooth fairy. By the way, the going rate for a baby tooth seems to be around \$5 these days – WOW! Do you remember how much the tooth fairy gave you for your teeth?

[poll id="21"]

Congratulations Sammie!

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## Recycling Is Important...

Especially when you are this cute – my two youngest helped carry in the recycling bin on garbage day, chanting “Teamwork, teamwork” all the way! Awww!!



**Next On Dancing With The**

# Stars...

One of those rare amusing email forwards caught my eye, so I'll share. Besides, my last post was kind of a downer; here's something funny to counteract it:

Next Season on Dancing With The Stars:



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## More Beautiful Than Ever

My husband was in bed last night waiting for me to come up because I was putting some finishing touches on my daughter's school fundraiser and picture forms when we both heard a bunch of sirens. We live pretty close to the fire station, so we didn't think much of it, even if it was odd that they were allowing them to wail so loudly just before midnight. This morning a friend emailed me with the bad news, and I went to the local newspaper's website to see the details: our beloved community park, Imagination Station, burnt last night.

We still don't know how it happened, but it's obvious that this was not a natural cause – it was not lightning, and there is no electricity capable of sparking such a blaze at the park. Unfortunately, this seems to be the work of people, and whether it was intentional or an accident remains to be seen. At least no one was hurt physically in the blaze. But many in the community are emotionally distraught, for Imagination Station was a wonderful park where citizens from throughout the area would spend warm summer nights, cool autumn evenings, and many a Saturday afternoon with their families and friends. Funded by private donations and built by the hands of thousands of volunteers in 1994, it was a source of community pride. Everyone came together to create Imagination Station; kids volunteered their cool playground ideas, while adults physically built the play equipment and still others provided thousands of meals for the builders. The community worked together day and night, rain and shine for 6 days until it was finished. The final product was amazing, impressing locals and out of town visitors alike. And now much of it is gone.



Many people came out tonight to walk past the charred ruins. In a way, it was like paying one's respects, and many people stared at the blackened splinters in stunned silence. There were whispers, "Who would do such a thing?" and "How did this happen?", and one woman walked by slowly, saying quietly, "We will build it again. And it will be more beautiful than ever." I believe her to be right. People came together in 1994 and built an amazing park, and people will come together again to replace the one we lost yesterday.

"The Greeks built an Acropolis – And Noah built an Ark  
The Russians built a Sputnik But Bryan built a Park"  
(Bryan Times, 1957)





**\*\*UPDATE\*\***

There was an update in today's (9/17/10) newspaper saying that tons of people have stepped forward and created a volunteer organization to rebuild. It was insured, and [Spangler Candy Company](#) has stepped forward to cover any costs not paid for by insurance. There is a [Facebook page dedicated to the rebuilding of Imagination Station](#) where people can share their memories of the park or volunteer for the rebuilding. Unfortunately the fire investigation and the insurance company's investigation will both take awhile, and nothing can be done until they are finished. They hope to have the playground replaced by Spring, but that is still a long time, especially for those of us with kids. Sure there are other parks in town, but Imagination Station was the favorite. □ The little town made the big Toledo news though, they had a nice story:

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# Felony Dishonesty?

What do you think about this: a guy goes to the drive-up window at his bank, and they accidentally give him \$3350 that was supposed to go to another customer. He drives off. He is now facing felony theft charges.

I wanted to blog about this because I really disagree with it. Morally, it wasn't right of the man to drive off with money he knew did not belong to him. Ethically, he should have notified the teller of his or her mistake, and the teller should have thanked him profusely. But I believe that to charge this guy with theft is wrong. Sure, he took someone else's money, but it was a bad decision made in the heat of the moment. He saw a lot of money, it had been given to him, and he made a mistake. It was a bad decision, and a greedy one at that, but deserving of a felony? I think not. If convicted, this man will have a felony record. He will have trouble finding employment, and he will lose basic freedoms that many people take for granted, such as owning a gun or being able to vote. I believe it to be a bit severe to slap him with a felony record when his crime shows no premeditation nor malice toward another. For all he knew, he was **given** the money and he might not have realized that his taking it would have hurt anyone. He did not hold up the bank, and order a teller to give it to him or use a gun to get the money. Again, clearly the wrong thing to do morally, but were his actions criminal?

What do you think? Check as many answers as you'd like, and feel free to add any thoughts or opinions you have in the comments section.

[poll id="20"]

If you would like to read the article before voting in my poll, below is a copy of the [original article](#) that was printed

on dailyherald.com. Hmm, I see that his court date is only days away. I will post an update to this story if I come across one.

*A man who reportedly drove off after a bank teller mistakenly gave him \$3,350 that was supposed to go to another customer now faces felony theft charges.*

*The teller at a drive-in window of Chase Bank, 2555 Golf Road, Hoffman Estates, accidentally sent the cash to the wrong customer and quickly told the recipient to come inside the bank, said Cook County Assistant State's Attorney Moe Ahmad.*

*But the driver, whose name and address was known to the bank because of his transaction, drove away, Ahmad said.*

*Hoffman Estates police arrested Luis Villarreal, a 26-year-old stay-at-home father, Thursday in his home in the 600 block of Alcoa Lane in Hoffman Estates. Ahmad said police found \$2,920 in a diaper bag.*

*Cook County Associate Judge John J. Scotillo set Villarreal's bond at \$25,000 and ordered him to appear at 9 a.m. Sept. 16 in room 108 of the Rolling Meadows Courthouse.*