

Knowing I Love You Man

I'm going to take a break from my New York Trip Diary to write up a few movies. All I have left is the World Trade Center site post anyway, so that's just one thing on a trip of hundreds! Besides, writing up these 2 movies should be easy, since I don't have much to say about either one...

Last week for date night, we saw [Knowing](#), a movie we had been looking forward to. Not that we're Nicolas Cage fans (quite the opposite actually); the movie just looked intriguing. It's about a guy whose son gets a piece of paper with hundreds of numbers on it which was buried in a time capsule for fifty years. After some investigation (and A LOT of liquor!), Nicholas Cage discovers that the numbers correspond to the dates, places, and the number of fatalities that would occur during certain calamities – they have all occurred already; except for the 3 left on the list. And that's about it. Cage's acting was no better than usual (why did I think this would be one of his better movies? Can you tell he is Francis Ford Coppola's nephew?), and I don't want to spoil the ending for you, but I found it cheesy and actually kind of dumb. I was entertained, but barely, and I did doze a tad during this one, although the action sequences awoke me with a start. Feeling unsatisfied after this movie, we decided to make it a double feature and sneaked into [I Love You Man](#) – no, I'm kidding, we went back to the cashier and paid for the movie legitimately – besides, we needed a refill on our pop and popcorn, though the latter was quite regretful.

I Love You Man looked like kind of a dumb comedy, but we've been appreciating the actor Paul Rudd lately (he is SO funny in Role Models and Friends reruns), so we decided to check it out. What we got was kind of a dumb comedy, but actually not as bad as I thought. It wasn't *entirely* predictable, and there were some funny moments that they actually hadn't spoiled in the movie's trailers. If you like silly comedies

and Paul Rudd, check it out. It's not nearly as funny as Role Models, but it **is** much less crude.

New York Trip Diary Volume 5

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from previous posts)

Monday, March 23 – We left the hotel for the Pittsburgh Zoo and promptly got lost. Many cities are situated on just one river, but some bank alongside 2 or 3 rivers, and that's where Pittsburgh lost me and we, in turn, got lost. Multiple rivers and all those hills – I have lots of trouble navigating my way through hills and mountains for some reason – probably because if you miss a turn, you can't just go a block and correct yourself because there's hills in the way. And Pittsburgh was also not lacking in what had become our nemesis (besides the ever-elusive Waterways bus) on this trip – construction zones. And we already talked about how Jill the GPS doesn't do detours. Lost as we were, we again got lucky and didn't wind up in any bad neighborhoods, but we did have to go without breakfast and almost without lunch. We stopped at a random police station for directions, and they were very nice (though they have some of the funkiest accents I've ever heard there in Pittsburgh – what IS that?), but the directions were very complicated, probably because of the rivers and hills to drive around, and we got lost again. Finally we found the zoo, and we picked up lunch at a little food stand on the river across from the zoo, and we refrained from making good on our threats to throw Jill the GPS in the river. Except now we were down to only getting to spend 2 hours at the zoo

before they closed.

[The Pittsburgh Zoo](#) is nestled within some steep hills – like all the zoos we visited on this trip – and you had to take an elevator to get up the main hill and into the zoo. Once inside, we were very impressed. I'm having trouble deciding which zoo I like better between Pittsburgh and Akron – Cleveland is not even on the same level as the other two. Pittsburgh has a thriving elephant herd – 2 calves born just weeks apart last July! Baby elephants are somewhat rare and difficult to come by in zoos – if a zoo can actually get elephants to breed (and I know the baby in Toledo was conceived via artificial insemination, so breeding might be somewhat difficult), they still have to wait through an extremely long gestation period (almost 2 years!) before seeing if they have a healthy calf. So the fact that Pittsburgh has 2 elephant calves that were born in the same month last year (also the same month as our baby boy!) is nothing short of amazing.

The Pittsburgh Zoo has an awesome aquarium with 3 types of penguin and a huge seahorse tank – next to manatees, seahorses are my favorite animal, and I have never before seen such a nice habitat for them or such huge seahorses! Also in the aquarium is an area where you can pet stingrays, and there's even a tunnel that runs underneath their pool that kids can crawl through and come up in the middle of the pool. Here is a picture of my daughter after she crawled through the tunnel:



And speaking of tunnels, Pittsburgh Zoo has a tunnel that goes *under* their polar bear pool! How cool is that? We didn't actually see it because we were there near closing time, and the bears were pacing by the door to go in for the night – we knew they wouldn't be swimming any more that day, so we skipped the tunnel. But I must go back some day to see that, and also to spend more time in this awesome zoo – ok, I guess I just decided that I like Pittsburgh just a little bit more than Akron, but it was a tough call! Too bad Pittsburgh is almost 5 hours away, or I'd return in a heartbeat! And I forgot to mention how many fun things they have to kids to do, even beyond seeing the animals. They had a totally awesome looking playground, but we didn't go on that one because we weren't sure we'd have enough time. When we got to the end of the zoo, there was another playground, so we let them play on that until closing time. Our 2-year-old got “stuck” at the top of the playground – she was too scared to go down the slide and refused to come back out through the tunnels. I was worried that we'd get locked in the zoo like a couple of college kids I read about in Jack Hanna's hilarious book, *My Wild Life* – they got locked in the dark reptile house, where they could hear things splashing around all night! After we got my daughter to come down off the playground (thanks to her big sister who lured her away), the sea lions were putting on a little show right in the front of the underwater viewing window – which reminds me, we had also gotten to see an impromptu sea lion show earlier in the day – the zookeepers were training them and rewarding them with fish, it was really cool to watch!

On the way home, we stopped in Elyria, Ohio for dinner at a Golden Corral (always delicious) where my husband was a victim of racial discrimination by the steak griller, and we found what must be the last non-Super Walmart left in the world. Trying to save room in the car, we had neglected to pack enough diapers for our two children who still wear them, and we had to break into the new packs of diapers right there in

the Walmart to change a double poopie from the baby and his big sister! It was interesting to be in a Walmart without groceries where the employees were actually preparing to close the store for the night – almost like time travel, but if I traveled in time, the last place I'd go is Walmart!

So anyway, now we had only 2 hours left of the drive home, and it passed uneventfully – the kids slept. We got home sweet home at about midnight, and the kids were really excited to see their pets and their room – they had trouble getting back to sleep. The pets were happy to see us, and my thanks goes to our great friend Carol who kept the pets healthy and happy during our absence. I was really surprised to see how big the rats got in just a few days though, Carol, what did you feed them?!? ☐

So, I had an amazing adventure with wonderful people. And this is the end of my diary. Well, not really, I will have one more entry to go back to the World Trade Center site visit, but I'm waiting for the right time to blog about that – it was a very moving experience. So thanks for reading, and I hope you had fun and maybe even learned a little something about places you may or may not want to visit some day!

New York Trip Diary Volume 4

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from previous posts)

Sunday, March 22 – Learning from our mistake the previous day, we decided to eat breakfast in the room, and it was much less expensive, we had plenty of room, and we didn't have to worry

about the kids disturbing anyone. After breakfast, we headed to the city again, even though we were all kind of sick of it at that point. But when I had heard that we'd be going to New York, the top site to see on my list was the World Trade Center site. So even though we were sick of the commute to the city and searching for buses, we headed out to see Ground Zero. We caught another bus tour, but this one was "hop on, hop off", meaning you could get off at any of the stops, unlike the bus tour we had taken the night before. But in New York city traffic, we still ended up being on the bus for about an hour, much to the kids' dismay since they were starting to find the bus tours boring. But 3/4 of the kids took a nap (and hubby too!), which left me and Jamy to listen (and giggle) at the tour guide – a very hyper Asian woman with a very thick accent. She was very informative (when we could understand her, of course), but she would interject between her touring tidbits with concerns she had about the traffic – at one point she talked (nicely) to another bus, telling it we were there first and not to hit us. Another time, a man boarded the bus who was selling water and popcorn, and she felt the need to tell us, "this is not a movie theater". Duh.

Anyway, we arrived at Ground Zero, but I think I'm going to do a separate post on that experience – it really was mind-blowing.

We left the Trade Center site and went into the World Financial Center – a beautiful building where people were very nice and gave us detailed directions about how to get to the ferry without using the famous New York grunt n' gesture. The best news is that we weren't going to have to take a Waterways bus! Seems the ferry came right over to the financial district – YAY! On the way to the river, we found some gelato to buy in the financial center. Gelato is a type of Italian ice cream handmade on the spot, and it is incredible. I had trouble deciding on just 3 flavors, but I chose well: cookie dough, pistachio, and raspberry. They were all delicious, but

the raspberry was especially amazing. For those of you who know me, you will be shocked to learn that I like gelato even more than I like Dippin' Dots – that is how good it is!

So we made our way to the riverfront, and when we got to the ferry station, it was closed. Honestly, you'd think that at least 1 of the 5 or more people who had given us directions would have known this, but I guess not. And I don't think they were playing a trick on us because unlike the grunt n' gesture-ers, they were really nice – I think they just genuinely didn't know. So here we were again. Stuck in New York with no Waterways bus to be found. My husband was very smart when he read the fine print on the Waterways card we had that said Waterways buses would stop at any city bus stop on a Waterways route, so all we had to do was find one of those. We asked some not-so-friendly construction workers, who said that there were NO city bus stops on the entire street we were on. So we used the map on the Waterways card, and we went a few blocks this way and a few blocks that way, and we found a city bus stop which we thought was on a Waterways route... Unfortunately the only way to check if we were right was to sit and wait for a bus that might never come, but lo and behold, there was another Waterways bus, and my husband again jumped in front of it while we quickly scooped up all the kids before the driver changed his mind. We were really getting the hang of this now, but that was our last Waterways bus, thank goodness! Here is a picture of our 8-month-old's ET impression – Manny Jamy was the lucky baby-wearer since my back never would have tolerated it all day and we wanted to leave my husband open for our clingy 2-year-old:



We got back to the hotel which is where we had left our car, and my husband used their Wi-Fi to find us a hotel in Pittsburgh. We were having such a good time that we figured we'd extend the trip a little and make one more zoo stop. The only problem is, we didn't make it to our Pittsburgh hotel until 3 in the morning due to a 2 hour stop at Houlihan's for dinner! Why did it take so long? We were kind of a large party, and the place was mobbed. Add in 2 poopie diapers and a bathroom full of drunks, and well, you do the math. Some guy stopped on his way to the bar to gush over the baby, and while he was doing that, his girlfriend took a nasty spill up the bar stairs, glass (already empty, of course) flying out of her hand and everything. Instead of trying to get up, she just lay there, probably because she was so drunk (she wasn't hurt; I saw her later and she was fine), and her equally drunk boyfriend didn't even notice all of this. So I said, "Is she ok?" and when he turned to look, I fled with the baby. Interesting experience, but one that makes me even more thankful for home sweet home – we never have those kinds of crowds in our restaurants! Like I said, we got to our Pittsburgh hotel about 3 in the morning, and we had kids who didn't want to go back to sleep. But we finally got them down, and we got a few hours of shut-eye before it was time to get up and add a new zoo to my list!

New York Trip Diary Volume 3

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from previous posts)

Saturday, March 21 – We awoke about 8:30, which seemed early since we had arrived at our hotel late the night before and the kids stayed up for a little bit even after we arrived. So we went down to the hotel's restaurant to get breakfast, which was a mistake. I had thought it'd be cheaper to eat in the restaurant rather than get room service, and I had also thought we'd be cramped trying to eat in the room. But down at the restaurant, our kids went nuts, and continued to do so while it took about an hour for the food to come. And this was a nice restaurant – not a friendly mom n pop place where they actually like and tolerate kids like we're used to back home. They did have pretty good hollandaise sauce for their eggs benedict, but my enjoyment of it was severely compromised due to the stress of the kids. Our server kept walking by and mumbling things, and I'll admit that our 8 month old son does make a mess when he eats, but don't they all? We cleaned up the best we could, but that didn't stop the server from "stealing" our change. That's right, when we paid the bill, the included 14% gratuity apparently wasn't enough for him because he failed to bring the change back. Rather than try to track down Mr. Rude (we are SO not in Kansas anymore!), my husband took up the issue with the front desk.

Next it was time for the business meeting (the reason we came, I guess), and so Manny Jamy took the kids down to the pool while hubby and I met with the clients. Except they were late, and while we were waiting, I began to have doubts about

the baby and I being disruptive to the meeting, so I took him back to our room to put on his bathing suit so he could join his sisters in the pool. Just as I arrived, so did Manny Jamy with the rest of the kids, and we decided to take them for a walk outside instead. Our hotel was on the New Jersey side, and offered a postcard view of the New York skyline:



Even though I had never been there before, it seemed to me that there was indeed a gaping hole where the twin towers used to stand, and Jamy who had been there before confirmed this. We watched many a garbage barge sail by, and I was surprised to find that the sea gulls in New York are quite bashful – I guess I'm used to the ones at Sea World and Marineland Canada where they'll just swoop down and swipe the fish you buy to feed the dolphins and whales. But it was a nice day, and our hotel offered a nice little pocket of solstice tucked away from the frenzied traffic of the city. I wanted to kill as much time down there as possible since we were short on room in the car and my packing of toys for the hotel room had to be limited. But my oldest was tired – she fell asleep on a bench outside – and her little brother started losing it because he also needed a nap so badly. So we went back up to the room to wait for my husband's meeting to be over. Manny Jamy was nice enough to watch the two middle girls so that I could catch a nap with my oldest and the baby, and it was MUCH needed and MUCH appreciated. Our 2 year old fell asleep as well, which was a good thing, but I was disappointed I couldn't take her

to be shown off to the clients when my husband called – she is awfully cute! So anyway, I went down to meet the clients, and they were extremely nice. They have a baby who was born just 9 days before my son, and she was really adorable! I was disappointed – if I had known they had brought the baby, I would have stayed at the meeting and let the babies play together! Oh, well, at this point, I was just glad to be done with work and ecstatic to be well-rested so that we could go to the city and have SOME FUN!

Because we were on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, every time we wanted to go into the city, we had to wait for our hotel shuttle to take us to the ferry station, then wait for the ferry to take us across the river, and then board a Waterway bus (different from a city bus, as we later learned) to take us to our destination in the city. Not a big deal, but by the end of the trip, it had gotten a little tiresome to add that much traveling time to get where we wanted to go. So anyway, Saturday night, we ventured into the city to take a bus tour on one of those double-decker, open-topped buses. On the way to the tour bus stop, we weaved our way through the massive crowd that is the Manhattan theater district on a Saturday night. We did have a few celebrity sightings; including the actor Morgan Freeman:



though Mr. Freeman did have the personality of a candle, as [Jamy](#) pointed out. We also saw multiple Statues of Liberty walking around, but a few of them were getting into trouble

with the police. Now that's something you don't see everyday – a Statue of Liberty getting arrested – too bad I didn't get my camera ready in time to take a picture, that would have been one for the scrapbook! We also saw Bugs Bunny, Elmo, 2 Cookie Monsters, a walking sandwich, a naked cowboy (don't ask), and Batman. Except I don't think it was the real Batman unless he's always been African American – besides, the real Batman would have been fighting crime in Gotham City, not posing for pictures on the streets of New York. Here is one of the Cookie Monsters – look carefully and you can see Elmo to the right:



We got suckered by some street vendors and sampled their wares of smoked meat, hot dogs, and art. My husband bought a caricature of our oldest daughter and a sign with our youngest daughter's name in calligraphy, but walking around with those souvenirs was like writing "suckers" on our foreheads – we got hit up for everything after that, from purses to sunglasses to comedy show tickets. Actually, we kind of got "had" again – when my husband bought the \$5 sign for our daughter, the artist started putting a frame on it, which would have upped the price to \$20. My husband kept saying, "no frame, no frame!" but all of a sudden, the artist no longer spoke English, so he went ahead and framed it and charged us \$20. My husband did not pay him the full \$20, but I know it was still more than the \$5 it was supposed to have cost – oh well, you only visit New York once, at least in our case – I won't

go back, at least not with little kids!

So then we boarded our tour bus, and that was really neat, informative, and offered gorgeous views of the city at night.



Ok, the picture obviously doesn't do it justice, but here is my 2-year-old daughter seeing her first skyscraper:



It was kind of chilly, and we tried moving down to the first floor of the bus, but the view did not compare with what we could see on the top, so we ended up moving upstairs again. The city was gorgeous at night, but when we went over the Manhattan Bridge, it was so high up, it was kind of freaky! Being on the top of the bus and looking down, you couldn't even see the road, just the water below, and I couldn't help but think how easy it would be to just leap over the side... not that I would do that of course, I'm just saying.

After the bus tour, we tried to find the Waterways bus – the

one that would go back to the ferry station, but we had some trouble. We ended up sitting on a street corner for about two hours. We stopped a passing taxi, figuring we'd just pay the expense just to get us and the kids off the streets of New York, but we couldn't even all fit in one taxi. I was strongly against the idea of splitting up in any way, shape or form, so our next idea was to stop a passing horse and carriage. While asking the very friendly Irish driver directions to the ferry bus, his horse took a gi-normous leak right there on the street, but at least the girls were momentarily entertained. We declined the \$70 horse and buggy ride, and finally the Waterways bus arrived – my husband practically jumped in front of it to stop it since the previous one had passed us by, but it worked – the bus actually picked us up!

Overall, an interesting night in New York. And it's not like I expected people to be overly nice. I certainly didn't expect it to be like my hometown, where you can't walk down the street without strangers saying hi and you can't walk around with kids at night without people offering you a lift. But it was still an adjustment – every time we'd ask how to get to the Waterways bus, people would just point off in a general direction and grunt, even police. And it was amazing to me how a family with 4 small children could set up camp on a street corner for 2 hours without one soul taking notice – I swear, we could have moved there and no one would have known nor cared. By the end of it all, I can't believe how sick of Times Square I was... Oh, and I forgot to mention, while we were searching for the Waterways bus, we came across a small deli that was actually recommended to us by our tour bus driver – Z Deli. The place had amazing falafel and gyro sandwiches! And their prices were reasonable, especially for New York City – no, reasonable is not even the word for them. I'm talking \$.99 slices of pizza, and the huge gyro sandwich was only \$3.99! Its only shortcoming was the lack of places to sit, but the guys who run the place went out of their way

to accommodate us (in anti-New York style, it seems), letting us dine at their “internet cafe” area.

So after the “miracle bus” picked us up, took us to the ferry station, and we rode the ferry and picked up the hotel shuttle, it was very late and we were exhausted. It exhausts me just to type out the story, as it probably exhausts the reader to absorb my excruciating details, so now’s a good time to cut this volume short – more later...

New York Trip Diary Volume 2

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from a previous post)

Friday March 20 (cont’d) – We arrived at the Akron Zoo about 2pm, which was right on schedule pretty much, although it would have been nice to have more time to explore the wonderful zoo that awaited us. From what I saw, Akron looked like a dumpy little city with a beautiful little zoo. All of the exhibits seemed to be of newer construction, and the animals seemed really active and happy. The Akron Zoo has many unique animals in their collection; including the super rare Sumatran Tiger, (most people are used to seeing Bengals, also called Siberian tigers as those are the ones frequently exhibited at zoos) and the Sumatran tiger was roaring when we saw him. They also have 2 types of animals that I was looking forward to seeing – the hyacinth macaw and the capybara (largest rodent on earth) – but both species were off exhibit waiting for warmer weather. No problem, we had seen capybaras at the Cleveland Zoo earlier in the day, and I have a macaw at home, not a rare hyacinth, but a macaw just the same. Akron

has a Malayan sun bear, the type of bear that was the inspiration to A. A. Milne for his Winnie the Pooh stories, and these are also not commonly on exhibit in zoos. When we stopped for lunch, we were pleased to find that the cafe is attached to a building with a Galapagos tortoise habitat, a komodo dragon exhibit, a really cool marmoset environment (a little marmoset – it's a small primate, if you don't know – came running up to the glass when he saw us with our nacho container and started licking the glass!), and an awesome jellyfish exhibit. Before Friday I had only seen one type of jellyfish – moon jellies – but the Akron Zoo has several different kinds on display. My favorite were the bulbous blue blubber jellies. Here is the marmoset trying to taste our nachos through the glass while my daughter is in the middle of a blink:



And next is a picture of the komodo dragon; I couldn't resist posting it. These things are incredibly ferocious and huge. Once they claw (and *look* at those claws!) or bite their prey (and I'm talking prey as large as water buffalo), they hang around until the animal succumbs to the 28 varieties of deadly bacteria the komodo has in its saliva and then devour it. [Sharon Stone and her husband Phil Bronstein have something to say](#) about the danger of komodos after one bit off his toes during a behind the scenes visit. You can't really tell from the picture, but this thing was almost 10 feet long!



The Akron Zoo is a place for great family fun. The girls got to be penguins:



and measure their wing spans:





Even though their baby brother didn't quite make it long enough to see all of the animals and activities Akron had to offer:



Another cool experience we had at Akron was hearing the bald eagles chirping. I always kind of assumed they would have big voices to match their size, but their tweeting was really cute! Overall, we had a wonderful day zoo-hopping. After our visit to Akron, it was time to head for our hotel in New Jersey. The ride was uneventful; the kids got some sleep and so did I. The traffic in New Jersey was absolutely horrible, which we totally expected, but what we didn't expect was all the detours. There were police and road construction everywhere, which amounted to a ton of traffic, especially for one in the morning. It was a bit stressful, but we did it, and kudos to my wonderful husband who kept his cool and guided us through the many detours for which Jill the GPS couldn't compensate. But who needs Jill? We made it without getting

lost! And as we were walking down the hall to room 913 to turn in for the evening, I turned to Jamy our great friend and traveling Manny (man who's a nanny in case you missed my first diary installment) and said, "At least we're not staying in room 911 for our trip to New York." He showed me his key, which did say 911 – oops. Thankfully it was just a coincidence, not an omen:



And here is a parting shot of our family outside the Akron Zoo from earlier in the day – stayed tuned for Trip Diary Volume 3!



New York Trip Diary Volume 1

When my family travels, I like to take notes and make a diary of our activities. I figure it will be fun to read later when the kids are grown up and will also bring back many memories that might otherwise be forgotten. Now that I'm keeping a blog, I decided to just keep the trip diaries in my blog; that way I don't have to write them twice and they're automatically saved for us in cyberspace. Last weekend, my husband had to go to New York on business, so we decided to make it a family trip and take the kids along. Here is a log of our activities:

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

Friday, March 20 – We left the house bright and early, only twenty minutes past our goal of 8 am. Disney and Christopher had kept us up until 2:30 in the morning the night before, so we were dragging a little, but they slept in so at least we could tie up loose ends without them. Sammie and Taylor were big helps in the morning! The kids were very good in the car even though Christopher got a little crabby toward the end of the first leg.

We arrived at the Cleveland Zoo 11ish – not my favorite zoo. I'm not one to complain about any zoo, but Cleveland had lots of walking to see a small amount of animals. I think part of the problem was that they were undergoing a lot of construction, so that made for more walking around the construction areas and also to some animals being off exhibit. They have koalas, but one was sick and the other was sleeping. I'm glad I got to see it anyway though since seeing koalas is a rare experience at zoos, but now I know why many zoos don't have them – they sleep 20 hours per day! Cleveland Zoo also has lots of steep hills, which was a "bear" (pun intended, wink wink) when pushing a double stroller, but luckily for me, that was my husband's problem. As we were

walking past the zoo's hospital, an employee told us to come inside because a baboon was about to have a physical. This is a really cool feature of this zoo – they have glass walls in their examination rooms so that zoo visitors can watch animals' procedures. Unfortunately, the baboon was not cooperative, and they couldn't get it sedated so we didn't get to see it. We waited for about an hour, but we really wanted to fit in Akron Zoo in the same day as well, so we decided not to wait any longer. Here are my girls waiting for the baboon's physical:



Cleveland Zoo also has a cool rainforest exhibit which normally costs extra admission, but our Toledo Zoo membership got us into ALL THREE zoos we visited on this trip for FREE!!! What a bargain AND an extra special Valentine's Day gift from my husband that keeps on giving! The rainforest exhibit had a cool 2-story monkey/squirrel exhibit, and a really nice view of a swimming gharial (a crocodillian with a long slender snout). But overall, the animal habitats were lacking. Thank goodness they are building new ones, but I wish they were building one for the giraffes. There were probably more than 10 giraffes confined to a tiny indoor room – at least it was only their winter quarters, so once it gets warm, they can go back outside and have room to roam. Hmm... maybe when I'm done with this trip diary, I'll have to develop a zoo rating system – that would be fun. Then I'd have an excuse to visit even more zoos, and re-visit some of

the old ones!



Here are the kids in front of the lion exhibit at Cleveland – then it was on to the Akron Zoo.

“Just Akron, cold beer, and poor poor thing for 2 weeks?” you ask? Well, not for two weeks, we were only there for about 2 hours, but I wanted to throw in that line from the stage play Harvey (and later, the movie starring James Stewart) that was running through my head for the two hours. Stay tuned for Akron!

New Jersey Is Lovely This Time Of Year, I Hear

Right now, I’m in the car with my husband, our 4 kids, and our volunteer “Manny” (a man who’s a nanny – thanks Jamiahsh!); we’re on the way to the New Jersey / New York City area! How did I manage to make a blog post, you ask? Well, I’ve actually typed this out days ahead of time and then used the brilliant tangents.org feature “schedule a post”, choosing the exact date and time for which my post will automatically publish itself! I love technology AND tangents.org!

So I think we’re probably between zoos right now; the

itinerary had us stopping at both the Cleveland and Akron Zoos in Ohio on the way to New Jersey. Two zoos only 20 minutes apart? How could I resist? And why can't *my* utopia of a hometown be located within a 20-minute vicinity of two zoos?!?

I hope we made it to both zoos without being too pressed for time, and I also hope the kids are being good on the long car ride. I hope our business meeting goes well tomorrow and that we have a lot of fun before making it home safely. Until I return...

Elephants Are Not Toys

I saw this article in the news a few weeks ago and was reminded why I will never take my kids to a circus:

INDIANAPOLIS – More than a dozen children were injured Saturday morning at the Indiana State Fairgrounds when a circus elephant they were waiting to ride got startled and caused some scaffolding to give way.

The scaffolding stairway leading people to the elephant ride collapsed just before 10 a.m. inside the Pepsi Coliseum where the Murat Shrine Circus is being held, said Indianapolis Fire Department spokeswoman Capt. Rita Reith.

At least 15 children between the ages of 8 and 12 years old were taken to first aid stations at the site, but most suffered only bumps and scrapes, Reith said. One adult suffered a minor arm injury when he or she fell from the top of the stairs.

It's unclear what caused the elephant to become startled.

The circus continued as scheduled.

Well, first things first – thank goodness no one was seriously hurt. And it's not that I'm some crazy animal rights activist. But I do believe in treating animals with respect. And I don't see how it's possible to treat circus elephants with respect given their busy show schedule, the cruel training methods, and the high intellect noteworthy of the elephant. Not only is the performance schedule strenuous, but the fact that such a huge animal is forced to travel from city to city *on a train* leaves no room for an argument that the animals are being treated with respect – in my opinion anyway. In fact, given the conditions that circus elephants are continually forced to endure, I'm actually surprised that circus catastrophes don't occur more often.

Zoos are another story; zoo animals' habitats try to mimic nature as closely as possible; they're not exploited for the sake of making a few bucks (pony rides and things like that are different – as I said, elephants are highly intelligent and when you add in the traveling with the circus and the sharp stick used to prod them when they disobey...), but rather, zoos exist to help educate the public. And if the general public is going to care enough about animals to want to help endangered species and to further conservation, zoos are a key factor in making this happen. So that brings me to the following picture, which was in an email I was sent. There is a zoo exhibit in Canada where you get to go in a pool adjacent to the polar bear exhibit; with only a pane of glass separating you from the polar bears (albeit a VERY thick pane of glass!). It's a great example of how zoos can capture and hold people's attention about animals without harming the animal in the process. Check it out – maybe I can see it live some day!



A Time Capsule – Literally

And while I'm on the subject of time capsules, the following article about hidden history really caught my eye:

(CNN) by Kelly Marshall – A long-hidden message has been discovered inside Abraham Lincoln's pocket watch, the Smithsonian's Museum of American History announced Tuesday.

Watchmaker Jonathan Dillon was repairing Lincoln's watch in April 1861 when he heard about the attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and wrote a short message on the metal inside the watch, the Smithsonian said.

There it remained, unseen for almost 150 years, it said.

In a 1906 interview with The New York Times, Dillon reported that as soon as he heard the news about the first shots of the Civil War, he unscrewed the dial of the watch and wrote on the metal, "The first gun is fired. Slavery is dead. Thank God we have a President who at least will try."

The actual message that the museum found differs from the watchmaker's recollection. It says, "Jonathan Dillon, April

13-1861, Fort Sumpter [sic] was attacked by the rebels on the above date J Dillon, April 13-1861, Washington, thank God we have a government, Jonth Dillon."

According to the Smithsonian, it was not unusual for professional watchmakers to record their work inside a watch.

"Lincoln never knew of the message he carried in his pocket," said Brent D. Glass, director of the National Museum of American History.

The museum decided to open the watch after being contacted by the watchmaker's great-great-grandson, Doug Stiles, who had heard about the message Dillon said he had inscribed and wanted to see if it was really there.

I think it's really cool that this window into history was only recently discovered. If we had known about it all along, I don't think the message would carry as much significance. The fact that the message's existence was the subject of a family legend only adds to the mystique, and it's a good thing the museum decided to follow up on the great-great-grandson's tip!

Buried Treasure

In our local newspaper lately, there's been multiple stories covering the demolition of an old high school in the county. The demolition uncovered a few surprises; one was a time capsule, placed in the brick walls by students and faculty in 1922 when the high school was built. I found it really neat that no one knew the time capsule was there until a few weeks ago when a bulldozer found the vintage peanut butter can filled with letters from students and other 1922 memorabilia.

The high school was finally knocked down, but construction crews are still deconstructing the foundation of the old building. In the newspaper the other day was an item about another buried treasure. It seems the school was built with a long-forgotten swimming pool, whose existence was uncovered after many weeks of demolition. Upon further investigation and interviews with surviving former students, it was discovered that the former swimming pool did actually exist but was never actually used since it was contaminated with raw sewage (eww!) shortly after it was built. They filled in the swimming pool with clay and built over it, and it was forgotten about until the school's demolition all these years later in 2009.

The story of the legendary swimming pool was of particular interest to me because at my own high school (located in suburban Chicago, far away from the rural Ohio area where we now reside), there was always a rumor of an ill-fated swimming pool. Our gym's floor sounded hollow, and there was always chatter about the existence of a secret covered-up swimming pool underneath the gym floor. I never did find out if there was any truth to the rumors, and I wonder if students attending that high school today talk of the same legend?