

Vacation Diary – Chapter Three

Tuesday, Oct 21 – We visited Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, and the Out of Control Magic Show at Wonderworks. Universal and Islands are right next to each other, but there is a lot of walking between the two. A lot of walking and not so much for the kids. But they did have fun, especially Disney who got to see Barney Live. I missed the Animal Actors show this year, but I was more in the mood for rides, and we got to ride plenty. The new Simpsons ride is actually better than I expected. It's the old Back to the Future ride except you are now riding through Springfield. The waiting area is themed well, and you get to watch little Simpsons snippets while you wait – talk about making the time go by fast! The ride is very cool, and you actually feel like you're riding around Springfield. The Mummy ride is still my favorite thing in both parks, and it's as cool as I remember. I especially like sitting near people who haven't been on it before – it's a blast to see the reactions to the haunted house meets roller coaster. Over at Islands, we got positively soaked to the core riding the Bluto boat ride, but that was expected because I rode it twice – those huge raft rides are my favorite type of water ride. My 4-year-old Sammie hated it, much to my surprise because she was just playing in the sprinklers at Epcot the night before. But she felt better after going on one of the kids' favorites, the Cat in The Hat ride. Our two-year-old loved that one too. We were a bit strapped for time and didn't get to try some of the coasters and other rides I've never been on over at Islands, but oh well, we still had fun. And my husband got chosen again (4th time now) to be an "actor" in the skit they do before the Earthquake ride which is now known as "Disaster". They redid it and added a cool hologram of Christopher Walken. And they chose my husband to be the "hunky" lead actor – but then, I always knew that ☐

The magic show was a lot of fun and it made me want to produce something like it locally for our community theater. It's kind of like stand-up comedy AND magic in one, with lots of audience participation. My husband, daughter, and our friend were all chosen to go on stage, and I filled up the camera's memory card trying to record everything. And a note to Jamiahsh – you really don't know me well enough by now to not point at me when they're asking for volunteers?!? You are so lucky he didn't pick me – I would have blamed you and had your head! Just kidding... well, kind of, but don't do that again!

Vacation Diary – Chapter Two

Monday, October 20 (Disney's 2nd birthday!!) – Started off bright and early in Orlando with a time share presentation – yuck. We've been to a few of these, and we try to schedule at least one every time we're in the Orlando area because they pay well. This time, we got \$100 cash. It took over 3 hours, but hey, that's over \$30/hour – well worth it in my opinion. I could go on and on about time share presentations because there are always certain things they do to get you to buy one – there must be a formula to the presentations. And let's face it, they're one of the biggest rip-offs that exist. The last few we've gone to, we've played a little game where I think of a random word my husband has to say to the time share people. This time it was "gondola". Unfortunately, we didn't get the word in because the presentation took much longer than they said it would (big surprise) and we had our friend jamiahsh waiting for us. This also saw us getting to Epcot later than we would have liked, but we still got to do most of everything we wanted at Epcot. If you've been to a time share presentation (or 2 or 3 or more), then you should check out the South Park episode about it. I'm not a huge fan of the

show, but the time share episode is hilarious. It was actually recommended to us by a time share salesman once!

The manatees are my favorite thing at Epcot. My husband makes fun because we have manatees right here at the Columbus Zoo in Ohio, but that's 3 hours away and I've only been there once. Besides, I've been to Epcot a bunch and I'm starting to get to know their manatees. Last time I was lucky enough to see them hugging! A peaceful feeling comes over me as I watch them swim. We did miss the Crush (from Finding Nemo) show, and we meant to go back for it but forget – oh well. And for those of you who've been to Disney World before, you should know that they've updated the Spaceship Earth ride – that's the one in the big huge golfball that is Epcot's signature. I don't like the new version nearly as much as the old one. The ride needed updating. It takes riders through the history of human communication, and one of the scenes had become outdated as time passed because people don't communicate in the ways that they visualized we would when the ride was built. Soarin' is my favorite ride at Epcot, but it always has HUGE lines. This time we were able to get a fastpass, but we could only ride once and my husband wasn't able to ride because our 2 year old was in a Daddy-clingy kind of mood. We ended the night at Epcot by running all over the park in a desperate search for a soft pretzel. Our 4-year-old was being so uncharacteristically well-behaved that I was willing to get her anything she wanted, especially since she was asking about it nicely.

Stress

I feel like I can barely keep my head above water these days – I'm so incredibly overwhelmed with things to do! To top it

all off, our dog had a huge swollen lump on her face that just kept getting worse so we had to take her to the vet. It's an abscess tooth, and the vet also found a few other problems. In short, we have to decide how much we can afford to fix. This dog is like one of our kids; we got her before we were even married, and at the time, we had trouble adopting a dog because we were so young and lived in an apartment, so shelters wouldn't let us adopt. But finally, we found Charity, and they let us adopt her, and she was the most terrible puppy you can imagine. We stuck through her puppy years, and by age 2 she was the best dog ever. She is now almost 11 yrs old and a major part of our family, to say the least. So anyway, she needs some treatment at the vet and at home, which will increase our busyness considerably. Add to that some household stuff I've been backed up with for months (still haven't unpacked all my hospital stuff from when the baby was born in July!), and it just keeps getting worse. It's really hard to do all the laundry and meal preparation and cleaning up after a family of 6 when I have two little kids to watch all day! Thank goodness the other two are in school, but between errands, feedings, diaper changes, cleaning up spills and messes, and playing, I don't have enough time left over for household duties, much less stuff I'm backed up on... And forget about hobbies; which is why I might have to let my blog go. I really don't want to; I enjoy writing on it; especially cuz it gives me a nice way to preserve memories for our family. But right now, it's a source of stress as it's just another thing I'm trying to work in. I wish I could be more passive about housework and laundry and stuff like that, but it just bugs the heck out of me when I let stuff go. And for good reason - I never have the time to catch up on stuff that's put off until later! But enough of that, I'm just venting my stress, and also warning you that my blog posts are going to become even more infrequent. It's a shame too... I have a lot left of our trip to FL to share that I'd also like to record in my diary... might not be able to write about it until 2009!

Vacation Diary – Chapter One

Because Disney World and the Orlando area in Florida are our favorite places to vacation, we make it a point to go as often as we possibly can. The last few trips we've made, I've been careful to keep a trip diary – a notebook log of things we do as well as hints that might help us make the next journey. Each trip to FL sees me taking a notebook for our trip diary, and I write about various things in it, depending how much downtime I have to write while the kids are sleeping. Here is an excerpt from the diary for this trip:

FRIDAY OCT 17, 2008 – Left town about 5:30pm. Unfortunately, our local Burger King we decided to get for dinner took about 30 minutes! Kids were rambunctious, so we stopped at a McDonald's Playland in downstate Ohio, wondering how we were ever going to make it the remaining 1,000 miles and back again (at least I was!). The good news is, the Playland seemed to tire out the kids and they fell asleep. They woke around midnight, but a trip into the gas station seemed to comfort Disney (almost 2 year old) and the kids slept until about 8 am Sat morning.

SAT OCT 18, 2008 – We stopped at another McD's Playland to blow off some steam, but it was raining, so their outdoor playplace was closed. The kids handled it well. This was north of coastal Brunswick, GA, so we made pretty good time the night before – thanks to sleepless driver Chris! Since the weather was nice, when we saw a sign around Jacksonville, FL that the beach was only 4 miles away, we decided to stop. We had a great time, and the kids had lots of fun wading in the ocean and collecting seashells. After that, it was on to Orlando, and we stopped and picked up the key for our condo rental when we got there. We then made it to the condo –

which was over 10 miles away, much to our surprise – where our faithful driver promptly crashed leaving me to facilitate the activities of 4 well-rested kids. But no problem, I was glad to do it. After all, I had been afforded a nice nap in the car on the way down, a luxury my husband didn't get. Of course, I'm a person who does best with 8-10 hours of sleep, not that I ever get close to that, but still... So I'm doing my best to summon all the patience I have so I can watch the kids who would not let me nap, and I ended up taking the younger two to Walgreens with me to get some supplies. The place we stayed in was very nice, but it didn't come with anything – no soap, shampoo, paper towels, beverages... for a family of 6 staying for a week, these were necessities I would need at the local Walgreens. I killed some time there, got lost on the way back, and by the time I had unloaded kids and groceries, my husband was rested and ready for some fun. We went to Golden Corral for dinner... delicious. Reminder for those of you who live in urban areas – we're not used to a variety when it comes to eating out. So, when we eat out, even at major chain restaurants, we appreciate them in a way we never did when they were available constantly.

SUN OCT 19 – slept in, had lunch at Golden Corral. Read my post about the previous night's activities if you don't understand why we had two meals in a row with Golden Corral. I would say the lunch is even better than the dinner. So then we went to Old Town, which is a row of shops fashioned like an old fashioned Main Street – there's even a general store where they sell little glass bottles of Pepsi for 50¢. When we first started going to Old Town 10 years ago, those little bottles were a quarter, but I'm not complaining – there's something about the glass bottle that makes that Pepsi taste extra good. Maybe it's the thirst quenching relief it provides after walking around in the Florida heat, or maybe it's the always much needed caffeine boost – whatever the reason, that little bottle always hits the spot. The Main St. part of Old Town is about 4-5 blocks long, and at each end,

there are carnival rides. The roller coaster is jerky but fun, and I went on the swinging boat ride which was scarier than it looked! My fearless daughter, who always wants to try the big rides but isn't tall enough yet, was shaken enough on the swinging boat ride that she cried. We sat on the end, which I knew would be more thrilling than the middle, but I didn't realize how much more mild the middle would be until I rode there with our friend Jamiahsh. We had lots of fun at Old Town and kinda lost track of time. We wouldn't have been late for the dinner show Arabian Nights if we hadn't left the tickets back at the condo... oops. We had to walk around in the dark and missed the first few minutes of the show. At least they let my husband in, who let us out at the door and had to park the car. The worker in the parking lot told him to give all the tickets to me, but when my husband tried to get in, they gave him a hard time without a ticket! Thank goodness he was able to get in and also find us in the dark. [Arabian Nights](#) is a great show. Think Medieval Times (if you've been there) without the chivalrous games. Well, there is a chariot race, but there are more acrobatics and horse dancing – the horses are gorgeous. My husband calls it Medieval Times for girls, and all us girls in the family love it. My husband was able to get a good deal on tickets online, so the show cost less than a regular dinner! And their food is really good. It's served with all-you-can-drink pop, which backfired a little bit because in the dark with the show going on, it was difficult to notice that our 2-year-old Disney was drinking A LOT of pop. So next thing I know, she's walking around, and she starts going up the stairs and tells me she'll be right back. I said, no, Disney let's stay in our seats, and then she YELLED at me – "I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!". It wasn't a really angry outburst, but if you know sweet little Disney, it was so out of character for her that it was hilarious. She was all hepped up on sugar and pop. So there's our first 2 days in Florida. We started Monday off with a time share presentation – ugh – so I'll take that as my cue to stop posting for now. This post is long enough, wouldn't you say?

Cold

It's a strange sensation; something I haven't experienced for about a year. Last winter I was pregnant, and due to the fact that pregnant women have 2/3 more blood coursing through their bodies than non-pregnant people, they rarely get cold. Then I had the baby in the middle of summer, went to Florida, and now that we're back in NW Ohio, it's cold! The older I get, the more I dislike the cold weather. Not only do I dislike bundling everyone up, including myself, but I especially dislike the winter gas bills. We have a humongous furnace that increases our gas bill by 144% in the winter months, which is why I opt to freeze a few months out of the year. I just can't bring myself to turn on that huge furnace for the season yet. Every year when we get our first winter-sized gas bill, we vow to winterize the house and we talk about getting a new furnace, but somehow, we never get around to doing anything. Maybe this year will be different, but in the meantime, I'm going to try to hold out until at least November 1. Maybe I should check the weather forecast before I say that...

Fall Back

It's been over a week since we've been in NW Ohio, and really, not much has changed. There are many less leaves on the trees than there were when we left for Disney World last Friday, but other than that... We haven't yet had a chance to check in with friends, so hopefully all is well everywhere. I have to admit

that I was a bit scarred from our last vacation – we returned to the horrible news that my beloved kitty had passed away. So this time, I was nervous about coming home. I told our pet-sitter that if anyone dies this time to not tell us while we were in Florida, thinking, what good would that do... but that decision ended up backfiring majorly because then the whole time I was worried that something had happened and I didn't know about it because I had left the instructions not to call us... But nothing catastrophic occurred, at least not to us or any of our pets, and we had a wonderful time. Now more than ever I know what people mean when they say that they need a vacation from their vacation. After taking 4 little kids on a 1,000+ mile road trip each way and returning with the trashed car and the dirty laundry and housekeeping catch-up for a family of 6, I could really use a vacaion!

Oh well... we had a great time and I wouldn't trade our experiences for the world – or all the laundry in the world. More to come about the trip after I unpack some and get used to the fact that I did not gain an extra hour this weekend like Jill my GPS friend told me I had – guess she (along with my alarm clock – glad I noticed that before tomorrow morning) is pre-programmed for the “fall back” switch for daylight savings time. The only problem is that Jill and my alarm clock were programmed before the daylight savings hours were adjusted thanks to President Bush. So they are now an hour behind... but no matter, they can stay that way for another week or two, whenever we change the clocks... and then, I will get my extra hour of sleep – always fun!

Kids' Birthday Parties

Had my daughter's 2nd birthday party over the weekend, and it was a blast. Family and friends came from far and wide, and my daughter recognized the "Happy Birthday" song I've been singing to her the past couple of weeks when everyone sang it to her. On a side note, I have a hint for parents everywhere, including myself the next time I throw a kids' birthday party: have something ready to give the kids to occupy them before the party, otherwise excitement and anticipation will get the best of them, ruining moods of kids *and* parents. My 3 kids were so anxious before the birthday party last weekend that they were running around, fighting, and even tantruming. I would advise giving the birthday child his or her present early (if they can all play with it without fighting!) or setting aside some kind of toy for all of your kids. Better yet, line up someone who can take the kids out of the house all together and let them arrive a mere 15 minutes before the rest of the guests – now that would have been bliss. It's just impossible to get last minute party preps finished with 3 (or any number, for that matter) wild children running amok. And forget about keeping the house clean while waiting for the guests to arrive. Here we are on Saturday, trying to keep the kids sane and serve lunch all while getting things ready for the party. Then we had to clean up the mess the kids made during lunch really quick before the guests began arriving, after making sure that they actually ate something in their excitement. The formula added up to one hectic pre-party morning and early afternoon, with the tantrum-thrower losing her voice before the party began.

But overall, it was lots of fun; especially getting to see family who aren't often able to make the journey to Ohio from Illinois. I know the birthday girl appreciated it and had lots of fun too, and I want to thank everyone who was a part of her special day. Thanks for the gifts and thanks most of

all for being there to wish Disney a happy 2nd birthday. Special thanks goes to justj and his family for the very special gifts they bestowed upon our family; as well as Carol and Megan who also were thoughtful about giving each of the girls a present. This helped alleviate much fighting later in the day while we were suffering birthday party comedown. Another special thanks to the family who travelled hundreds of miles to be there for Disney on her special day. Family and friends are the BEST!

BELOW: Disney eating her birthday cupcake



The Office – Great As Ever

Well, we've now gotten a taste of two new episodes for this season, and I think I can safely say that the Office is back on track and as funny as ever! It's always been funny; it's just that the few episodes that aired after the writer's strike weren't the best ones. But I'm happy to see that so far, this season is a riot and will keep me looking forward to Thursday nights.

Entitled, 'Business Ethics', the 2nd Office episode of the season saw Michael and Holly in a major disagreement. But no

need to fret, it was resolved by the end of the show, thank goodness. Sorry if I spoiled something for you, but you wouldn't want to be left hanging about that, now would you? I think I'll copy n paste the tvguide.com episode synopsis and comment on it. That's an easy way to write a review of the show and share the tvguide.com summary which I always enjoy. Tvguide.com is in *italics*, my comments are in **BOLD CAPS**.

With the exemplary premiere behind us, in which we were treated to Jim and Pam's engagement, Dwight and Angela's torrid and super-secret affair, Michael and Holly's evolving 'friendship' and Ryan's return as Pam's temporary replacement, does the second episode of the Office continue the momentum? The answer, my friends, is ...

Definitely. Maybe. Ummm ... Not so much.

It's hard to follow up near-perfection. WHILE I AGREE WITH THAT COMMENT, I WILL DISAGREE WITH THIS WRITER TO SAY THAT I THINK THE 2ND EPISODE WAS ALMOST AS GOOD AS THE FIRST – THERE'S JUST NO COMPETING BETWEEN AN HOUR OF THE OFFICE AND A HALF-HOUR OF THE OFFICE. "Weight Loss" was a one-hour gem, while "Business Ethics" had some nice moments, particularly during the beginning of the show, but it had some disappointments for me as well. I'll list out my quibbles with this episode first, and then I'll get to the funny:

1) The Absence of Pam

After their shocking engagement, Pam is relegated to a disembodied voice on the telephone at the beginning of the show. No doubt there will be plenty of opportunities for her to take center stage as the season develops, and I understand that sending her to school makes it difficult to include her in the office's day-to-day, but it was jarring to all but ignore the Jim and Pam relationship right after their shocking engagement. AGREED – I MISSED PAM TOO, BUT IT WAS ONLY ONE

EPISODE, AFTER ALL. IF SHE ISN'T THERE NEXT WEEK, I WILL HAVE A BEEF.

2) *Ryan's ethics*

Reflecting back on an episode entitled "Business Ethics" I guess I was surprised that it focused primarily on Michael, Holly and Meredith, and only tangentially referred to the busted and now-humbled Ryan. I was expecting the episode to center more on Ryan somehow (don't ask me how, I'm just a recapper). **RYAN CAN BE ANNOYING IN LARGE DOSES, SO I'M GLAD HE WAS ONLY ON THIS EPISODE FOR A LITTLE BIT.**

3) *Holding back the crazy*

Creed didn't say or do anything [Creed-like](#); Andy didn't sing a capella or punch a wall; even Michael and Holly's "Let's Get Ethical" intro was a schtick we've seen before. So even in an episode with Dwight peeing into a soda bottle, the usual absurdities of the Office family felt somehow muzzled or restrained. **CREED DID SAY AT LEAST ONE REALLY FUNNY THING – SEE BELOW.**

But enough with the criticisms. Let's get to the kudos. I thought the "personal time" subplot was the highlight of the show, and led to the episode's two best scenes:

1) Battlestar Galactica.

This scene was so pitch-perfect, especially for a sci-fi nerd like me, that the only way to do it justice was to transcribe it:

Jim: Hey Andy

Andy: Yo

Jim: By any chance did you see Battlestar Galactica last night?

Andy: No I did not. Is that any good?

Jim: Actually not, it's really so-so.

Jim: I don't like all the crazy monsters and stuff, like Klingons and Wookies and all that.

Jim (looking at Dwight): Sorry, is there something you wanted to add Dwight?

Andy: Is that like the original Battlestar Galactica?

Jim: You know what's weird, it's practically a shot-for-shot remake

(Dwight crumbles paper in frustration)

Jim: The story is kinda bland, it's about this guy called "Dumbledore Calrissian" who needs to return the ring to back to Mordor

Andy: That doesn't sound right ...

2) 19:48

It's easy for Jim to push Dwight's buttons, and it's easy for us to laugh at it. Jim's pranks on Dwight have been the stuff of legend, but this was the first time that Dwight had it over on Jim – and Jim didn't even know it.

*The smugness on Jim's face when he got Dwight to admit that he took "personal time" paled in comparison to the sidelong glance Dwight gave the camera when he admitted that "Yes, maybe I'm not" ethical. The camera panned over to Angela buttoning up her shirt, and we understood how Dwight spent that 19:48. I loved that the writers gave Dwight this moment over Jim – unexpectedly turning the tables and making Jim's prank just seem irrelevant. **THAT WAS A NICE MOMENT.***

And finally, here are my favorite one-off lines:

*"The tall guy got engaged" – Creed **CLASSIC CREED, HILARIOUS!***

"I've listened to Cookie Monster Sings Chocolate Rain 5,000 times" – Michael. (By the way, I tried like heck to find this video on You Tube, but no luck. [But here's the consolation prize](#))

"You've been cuckolded by a stronger, smarter male" – Dwight

*So, what did you guys think? **LOVED IT.** Am I right that this episode – while good – did not live up to the season*

premiere's lofty heights? I THINK YOU'RE WRONG. IT WASN'T AS GOOD AS THE PREMIERE, BUT PROBABLY ONLY BECAUSE IT WAS ONLY HALF AS LONG AND FOR THE PREMIERE EPISODE, WE WERE SO HAPPY TO HAVE THIS AWESOME SHOW BACK AFTER SUMMER HIATUS!

Silent Politicians

What an oxymoron this post title presents, doesn't it? Silent politicians... is there such a thing? The proof was sighted in NW Ohio last weekend – here it is:



That's Obama on the left and McCain on the right – true to real life politics. Hillary is in the middle... the display must have been designed months ago...

More Recipes

I sent some recipes to my sister and since I had to type them into the computer anyway, I will post them on my blog. The first two are great for Thanksgiving, and the last one is a

yummy version of lasagna that is great for moms to make because you can do the preparation while the kids are napping or eating lunch, and then it will cook all day in the crock pot. Also, you make it with cottage cheese instead of ricotta cheese which can be expensive. Enjoy!

Pearl Onions in Cream Sauce

1 – 10 oz pkg red or white pearl onions, peeled according to package directions

3 TBL butter or margerine

3 TBL flour

1 1/2 cups milk, heated almost to boiling point

2 TBL cream sherry (optional)

1 drop tabasco sauce

dash ground nutmeg

white pepper and salt to taste

chopped parsley for garnish

To cook pearl onions, drop peeled onions into boiling water. Cook for 10 mins. and drain. To make cream sauce, melt butter or margerine over medium-high heat. When melted, add flour, stirring constantly with wire wisk, until all butter is absorbed. Turn heat to low and add milk slowly (make sure to continue stirring with the wire wisk). Add sherry, tabasco sauce, nutmeg, pepper and salt. Fold-in cooked onions and mix well. Before serving, garnish with parsley. Variations: When folding cooked pearl onions into cream sauce, add 3/4 cup cooked green peas. Makes 4-6 side dish servings.

Sweet Potatoes With Blue Cheese and Pecans

4 lbs sweet potatoes

3 TBL olive oil

6 sprigs thyme or 1/2 tsp dried

1 cup pecans

1 cup blue cheese

Combine sweet potatoes and oil in a roasting pan, sprinkle with thyme. Roast for 30-45 min at 425 or until tender. Transfer the sweet potatoes to a serving bowl. Gently toss

with pecans and cheese. Salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with remaining thyme. Serves 6.

Crock Pot Lasagna

1 lb lean ground beef
1 onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, smashed
1 – 28 oz can tomato sauce
1 – 6 oz can of tomato paste
1 tsp dried oregano
1 tsp salt (approx.)
12 oz uncooked lasagna noodles
12 oz cottage cheese
1 cup parmesan cheese (approx.)
16 oz shredded mozzarella cheese

In a skillet, cook ground beef, onion and garlic until beef is browned. Add tomato sauce, tomato paste, oregano and salt. When sauce is thoroughly warmed, spoon a layer of the meat sauce into the bottom of the crock pot. Add a double layer of uncooked lasagna noodles, breaking to fit if necessary. Top with a layer of each of the cheeses. Repeat process until sauce, noodles, and cheeses are gone. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hrs. NOTE: My lasagna began to overcook a little before 4 hrs in the crock pot!