

Harvey, You Were Awesome

I was thinking that I should get in one more blog post before the New Year. I was going to write a general update about my beautiful family, but before I got to writing it, I found myself thinking of Harvey.

Let's begin at December 26, 2011. My husband and the kids surprised me with a wonderful Christmas gift: they had **all** saved and planned for months to buy us a zoo membership. Our family loves zoos and has had a membership to the local zoo (whichever zoo happened to be local at the time) for as long as Hubby and I have been married. I remember that our most recent zoo membership expired on April 1st of last year – I remember this because I made sure to visit on April 1st for what would be our last visit to the zoo for many months. For budget reasons, it didn't make a lot of sense for us to renew the membership because I was expecting our 5th child in October – what pregnant lady wants to take her 4 kids to the zoo in the summer? Not this one. So we let the membership lapse. I missed our visits to the zoo, but at the same time, plagued by pregnancy related nausea and fatigue, followed by post-cesarean surgery recovery and the joys (and trials) of caring for a new baby brother to 4 other kids, I didn't *really* miss our visits to the zoo...

But then my family surprised me with that membership. Now that I'm healed from the surgery. Now that the baby has stayed with the babysitter a few times and actually liked it. Now that I can take my home-schooled kids to the zoo any time I feel like taking a field trip!

This past week was a great one! Hubby was able to flex his work schedule to spend a lot of time with the family, and we all enjoyed the break, which included visiting the Toledo Zoo. In our travels to zoos over the years, we saw many amazing things and learned many amazing things. Among them:

zoos are GREAT to visit in the winter! Many animals are so much more active in the cold weather, and there are many less people, allowing visiting families opportunities not normally offered (Example: my kids made bird feeders as a craft at the zoo and *loved* it!!).

Being winter, some of the exhibits were closed. Other animal environments were rearranged from the last time we had been there, so we couldn't quite keep tabs on our familiar favorites. We did notice that the Great Apes area was rearranged. There was a sign saying that the Great Apes area was going to be closed for the Lights Before Christmas event, but we saw the gorillas and orangutans, so we didn't think much of it. Until we didn't see Harvey the Chimp. When I got home, I looked in the Toledo Zoo's newsroom online and saw that Harvey had passed away in August. It was sad for me; Harvey's exhibit was one of my favorite stops at the zoo. He was an elderly chimp who loved little kids, and here is a video I have of him playing with my kids. I can't be too sad though; Harvey died in his sleep, at the healthy chimp age of 52 – DOUBLE the average life expectancy of a chimp in captivity.

My other favorite exhibit at the zoo, the orangutan family, was also rearranged – during our visit we saw only the mom and daughter – what happened to Boomer (my favorite zoo animal until Harvey stole the title), the patriarch of the oranges? Such things are commonplace in zoos, and I'm thankful that I once again have a membership that gives me insight to studying the wonderful creatures inhabiting the zoo. As much as I mourn my old favorites, I will be looking forward to watching the new additions as well: baby Lucas the elephant, the new baby tigers soon to be exhibited, and the new addition soon to be announced to the public due any day! Yes, I have inside info! One thing I love doing while visiting the zoo is talking to the volunteers, and one was beside herself with the awesome news of an impending birth! So much so that she

couldn't keep it to herself, even if she was supposed to!
Would I do the same if I was a zoo volunteer? Dunno... but in
the meantime, a HUGE THANK YOU GOES OUT TO HUBBY AND THE
KIDS!!! I've already enjoyed my zoo membership more than you
would have ever hoped for when you planned and saved!! LOVE
YOU GUYS!!!

I wish everyone reading this a very happy and safe New Year!

Here are tribute videos to Harvey the chimp – watch how he
played with my kids! We will miss him!

Cool Summer

The kids are growing by leaps and bounds before my eyes, and it's unbelievable because I'm used to seeing them most of the day, every day – and I can still see the changes. They are growing up literally before my eyes!

So far this summer, the kids and I have carried a normal daily schedule that finds our time divided between fun activities and miscellaneous appointments (like Bible study class, violin lessons, doctor's and dental appointments, etc). I think we've done a good job of making the days fun, and we've also had some great family weekends since school has let out. Father's Day weekend saw us heading out to the [African Wildlife Safari Park](#) in Port Clinton Ohio. We love that place, but it's almost 2 hours away so we hadn't made it out there in a few years. But there was a Groupon a few months ago, and we got a great price on admission, so Hubby planned a trip there. Can't go to Port Clinton Ohio and not stop at [Cheesehaven](#) – 88 types of cheese, meats, sauces... yummy stuff. They have free samples so you can try before you buy. Should you find yourself in this little Lake Erie town (which is near the more well known tourist attraction: roller-coaster filled Cedar Point), stop by Cheesehaven and get a fresh corned beef sandwich – YUM!!

The Safari Park is great – you drive around the animals' huge enclosure, and herds of all types of different animals approach your car looking for food! There are alpacas, llamas, white-tailed deer, elk, elands, bison, reindeer (I never found this one in the guidebook, but it looked like a reindeer to me!), even giraffes and zebras at the end (while you can still feed them, the giraffes and zebras are behind a fence whereas the other animals are not). It's so cool to

feed all these guys! Some are dainty, skittish eaters (the smaller deer), while the huge animals like the bison will fill your car with this hot, half-digested hay breath. It's delightfully disgusting, and only animal lovers should attempt to stomach this! Here is the best video I could record while getting accosted by a thousand-pound bison (the kids were frustrating us adults since they would freak out and drop the carrot before the bison could grab it – we felt bad for the hungry fella!)

And what is the poor thing in the picture below? A llama, I think? He had a funny lip, which coupled with his flat ear gave him a whimsical look – he was a favorite to feed.



And next is a video of the giraffe – sorry for the shakiness, but he was too tall to get in one shot! You can see his curly tongue that came out and helped him grab his carrot. The car in front of us had the right idea – they were feeding the giraffe out of their sunroof – it was a sight to see and I should have taken video!

The Safari Park also has pig races, an animal show, a small walk-thru zoo, and pony and camel rides for the kids. It was a SUPER day, followed by a special day to celebrate Dads after
□

Evil Animals



Every once in awhile, time.com has interesting countdown-style articles. The other day, this one caught my eye:

[Top 10 Evil Animals](#)

Beyond the expected varieties of insects, you'll be surprised to learn which mammals are featured (I know I was shocked by a few of the species the authors felt worthy of being on the evil animal list), and it's interesting to read about the characteristics of all the creatures included in this article. I was going to include a shortened version of the list so you didn't have to flip through the slide show, but some are so entertaining that I'm going to let you flip through for yourself – click the link above.

Jack Hanna, David Cassidy, Goats, Camels, And Live TV

I saw a link to this on Facebook, and it's hilarious – gave me my smile for the day! Watch chaos erupt on live TV in the 70s when Jack Hanna brings a gaggle of goats into the tv studio, and they run amok. The host, Bob Braun, has a great sense of humor about all of it, although the same can't be said for all of the audience members, especially those who end up with rogue goats in their laps! David Cassidy even has a hand rounding up the herd, and by the time the camel puts in his two cents, the host is practically rolling on the floor with laughter!

Right Out Of Flipper

Came across this inspiring animal story, and since I haven't had the time to blog about any of the (mostly yucky) personal issues going on right now, I thought this would make a nice feel-good post. I'm still working on that Florida trip diary, really, I am!! But in the meantime, here is a story about some dolphins who saved a dog's life. This happened in Marco Island Florida, where we took our wonderful honeymoon almost 12 years ago.

[Dolphins Save Dog](#)

Monkey, Er, Ape See – Ape Do

To take a break from the vacation unpacking, I took the little ones to the zoo a few weeks ago. We had a great time – oh how I love winter zoo visits! There aren't many people around, and the animals can act like the animals they are instead of worrying about the hoards of visiting humans. Well, most of the time it's cool to see the animals acting like animals, unless they are doing disgusting things like the gorillas last week – don't watch this if you are squeamish, but I have to publish it because of how embarrassed the gorilla seems about her behavior. I felt so badly for filming her after she tried to hide that I turned off the camera, and that's when she got up and went and sat behind a post – out of my view. Why would she do something so gross if she is embarrassed by it?

WARNING: it's VERY gross!!!

The chimp was another story! His name is Harvey, and he is a senior citizen chimp – he just had his 52nd birthday, which is quite a milestone for a chimpanzee. Despite his age, Harvey is quite playful and has a penchant for young kids. When we walked over in front of Harvey's window, he was sitting in the corner wearing a sparkly lei, presumably from his birthday party which had just taken place days before.



When he saw us, he pulled off his lei and came over to his window to see the kids and play:

These videos were taken almost a month ago, and I've been trying to get back to the zoo, but my oldest child has decided that the zoo is "boring" – her words, *NEVER* mine. In fact, I'm wondering if I need a DNA test – how could someone with my DNA find the zoo boring???

During the week, I'm so tired and have so much to do that just writing this blog post is quite a challenge – I'm having a towel thrown over my head by my 2-year-old as I write! I think I fell in love with Harvey that January day, and I miss him!

If Cats Ran The World

Because my family and friends know that I'm an animal lover, they're always sending me emails with pictures and articles about cute animal-related topics. All of them are adorable, but this one stands out as something to share – a man built an entire feline-sized village for homeless cats! Kind of sounds like something I'd like to do with some extra free time, money, and if only I didn't have the darn cat allergy that's always getting in the way...

Below are some pictures of his creation. For the entire story, [click here](#). And to visit the cat village online, The Caboodle Ranch, [click here](#).



Poor Paul The Psychic Octopus

No play on words necessary for this blog post – there really was a Psychic Octopus named Paul who lived in Germany, and he recently passed away at the ripe old age (for an octopus) of

2½ years.

In his lifetime, however short it seems to us humans, [Paul made himself famous](#) with his uncanny ability to predict World Cup game winners correctly! Before games, Paul would receive 2 boxes of mussels, one each with a flag of the countries of the two teams who would be facing off in the World Cup. The country whose box was eaten out of by [Paul](#) first was declared Paul's pick as the winner of that match, and he predicted correctly an astounding 100% of the time (8/8) for his World Cup predictions, and 86% (12/14) overall.

RIP • Paul the Octopus • 2008-2010



**EVEN BETTER THAN I
IMAGINED!!! (part 2)**

(This is a continuation of my previous post of the same title which can be [found here](#) in case you missed it.)



(This is us with Jack Hanna! In case you don't know who he is, I included a brief description of him in my previous blog post about the show!)

Before we went into the theater to see Jack Hanna's live stage show, we were just standing there gawking at Jack Hanna signing autographs. Suddenly, a group of young people came up to him, and he was so thrilled to see them that he quickly grabbed his cell phone and called his wife backstage, telling her that their 'special friends' would be coming backstage to see her. The friends are then ushered away, and Jack announced during the show that they are the [Von Trapp Children](#), a singing quartet of descendants from the family who inspired the infamous memoir, stage musical, and movie *The Sound of Music*. Apparently they had been in the Chicago area to tape an episode of Oprah (which will air on October 29), and they're family friends of Jack's and stopped by his show to surprise him.



(Me waiting patiently while Jack signs just one of my many books that I brought!!)

Back to the show... we are seated in the Paramount, and Jack Hanna comes out!! The show itself was a mix of live animals being brought out on the stage and video clips shown on a large screen, all narrated by Jack with his trademark anecdotes and sense of humor. In fact, at one point near the beginning of show, Jack Hanna began to tell a story, and all of a sudden he stops and looks off to the wings of the stage. "Do I have time to tell this story?" He asked (presumably the producer backstage), but then he didn't wait for an answer and replied to himself: "Of course I have time to tell it – it's my show!" It was not said in an arrogant fashion, but rather it seemed as if he were almost reminding himself that he is in charge. It was glimpses of genuineness like this that made his show so special. Jack Hanna is very real and down-to-earth (when it comes to being a celebrity anyway – often he is dreaming about ways to help animals with his head on the clouds!), and these traits take precedent in his live appearances.

So the story he told was hilarious! It was about his appearance on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader", and... well, you can listen to it if you'd like:

So between video clips of a few animal causes that are near and dear to Jack Hanna's heart ([Rolling Dog Ranch](#) and Mountain Gorilla Conservation, among others), the following live animals were brought out on the stage for Jack to tell us about: a Red-Ruffed Lemur, blind Barn Owl, Flamingo, 2-Toed Sloth (did you know that there is a bed and breakfast in South America where you get to take care of a baby sloth in your room overnight? I just might get over this fear of flying thing quicker than I thought I would!!), 3-Banded Armadillo, Siberian Lynx, baby Coatamundi, baby Bennet's Wallaby (got to meet him earlier at the Jamboree Lunch), Grey fox, Fennec Fox (got to meet him at lunch also), Lesser Anteater, an albino Python, and the finale – a full grown Cheetah! Seeing the animals was great of course, and hearing live 'Jack facts' about them was even better. But I think my favorite part of the show was the end – we watched a blooper reel of Jack getting licked, bitten, squirted, tossed around, etc. by animals, and one clip was of Jack Hanna making an appearance on David Letterman's show in the '80s. Jack is showing Dave how to milk a goat, and as usual, Dave is cracking jokes. Jack Hanna (the live version) cuts in, saying, "I didn't even mean to do this!" and the video clip shows him accidentally squirting Letterman with a spray of milk from the goat's udder! There is only one more thing that can make watching Jack Hanna on Letterman even more entertaining, and that is watching Jack Hanna on Letterman WITH Jack Hanna while he narrates it!!

We laughed (plenty of laughs when Jack and animals are involved!), we cried (that video clip of the Rolling Dog ranch was so heartwarming – the ranch takes dogs who are seriously ill, and many of them have extreme physical ailments), and then it was time to go. But not before we got to hear Jack's bear spray story again, and he even called on one of his assistants to act it out. He told this story during his previous appearance on Letterman, and it was hilarious then as it was hearing it and seeing it live. Funny, that is, until

we found out during the live show what *really* happened during that previous Letterman appearance. Apparently it wasn't demonstration-style bear spray, but the real thing, and Jack got sprayed in the face, causing loss of vision for over 10 minutes and some minor facial burns. Jack warned us (and David Letterman!) that he is planning revenge for his next appearance on the show in December, so stay tuned!!!



A sloth relaxing at a sloth sanctuary in Costa Rica. While we were on the subject of sloths, this picture was too cute to pass up!!

**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...