

# Kids In America

Upon accepting the invitation of again accepting the position of Manny, I was warned of problems that might present themselves on the 9-10 hour trip in the minivan. I am so happy that very few of these problems reared their ugly heads. Thank goodness for planned parental necessities. The three girls were equipped with their own bags of goodies for the long trip both to the East and back home again. We also had a large bag of DVD's to watch on the player in the car. I also brought a few kid-friendly Disney movies and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (one of my favorite movies growing up; sad to say the transition to the stage did not go as well).

Basically, I only remember the occasional statements of "are we there yet" and the like. The extremely long voyage across Pennsylvania had to be broken up to prevent melt-downs and I'm sure the adults enjoyed our happening upon [Bellefonte](#). In the dark, it seemed to be deserted but as we approached downtown there were cars, and several restaurants, many of which were some variation of a pizza shop. Funny that it was close to State College, home of Penn State University. We decided to stop at Mama Lucretia's.... pizza, pasta, cheesesteak all of which were very tasty (unless that was the hunger talking).

I must comment on the eating habits of one of the kids. "Goose" frequently made the comment that "Beeber" would have an order of paper with a side of plastic. The eight-month old will find anything to put in his mouth to indulge in: napkins, plastic bibs, straw wrappers, anything: typical. Just watch your plate; if he spies anything within reach, he will get it! After eating, most of the time a great majority of it ends up on the floor around him.

Back in the car for the remainder of the long jaunt, the kids all took naps. Taylhis also rested for a bit. I did my best to stay awake to ensure that C was still alert and going.

Thank goodness we had some music going and comedy. Listening to some Miss Saigon and Assassins seemed to make the time go a bit faster. I also learned that one of the songs from Jekyll and Hyde was cut from the final show. I saw the musical in Toledo a few years ago and saw that Bring on the Men was missing. I thought perhaps touring companies might have cut the song, but it was taken out prior to the Broadway run.

Finally, after the less than an hour announcement turned into a bit longer, we arrived at our hotel around 1.30 AM. Constuction, police cars everywhere, drawbridge, lots of obstacles.... AH travelling!! I LOVE IT! Especially when I am not driving ☐

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## If I Could Talk To The Animals

I just returned from a marvelous trip with my wonderful friends to the NJ/NYC area. We also made a couple trips on the way and on the way back. Who would have thought I would be able to take two trips in less than a year's time? My role of "[Manny](#)" was once again very fun (even if there were a few slight moments in which I threatened to go into the back of the minivan, sit on any malefactors, and tickle them).

Day one for me started about 6:30 AM. I had to be at C&Ls in time to leave by 8 and wanted to stop at Wal-Mart on my way. I stood on the front porch and knocked for about 5 minutes and decided to ring the doorbell butr apparently did not push it right since no one heard it. I did not want to get the dogs going, anyway. So... shortly after 8, we were on our way. First major stop... The Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. Not much there to

comment upon. Not one of the best I have seen; however, the next stop was one of the best.

We stopped at the Akron Zoo. Much better than Cleveland's offering. The exhibits were great. Outside the restaurant where we had lunch, there was a very friendly tamarin who was very active and liked to show off. There was also a very loud Sumatran Tiger. Not sure, but I think it was feeding time. Right next to the tiger was the animal that was the basis for the creation of Winnie the Pooh: the Malayan Sun Bear. We went into the animal hospital where a very informative and interesting volunteer informed us that a baboon was going to be brought in for a check up and we would be able to watch the procedure IF they could get the animal in the examining room. Unfortunately, he did not get there before our group decided that it was time to continue and see as much of the zoo as possible. Interestingly, there was a group of high school students who reminded me of my senior physics class trip to Cedar Point for Physics Day. Very fun zoo. Added to the enjoyment was [taylhis'](#) commentary which was very fun. I'm sure she will have even more to say and pictures to share.

Then it was back in the bus (OH... wait... that is ANOTHER post or two later on) for the L000000NG trek across Pennsylvania.

000PS! Apparently, my memory failed me. The problematic baboon was at Cleveland and not Akron. Thanks, Taylhis.

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## Miss Shaffer, Fifteen.

I have already posted on my junior high science teacher's most famous reprimand for students who step out of line. Today, I discovered that he may just be getting rather lax in his distributing of "15" in his old age. I found it ironic that

Shelby should bring it up because I thought that he had retired a few years ago... my mistake.

It seems that my oldest niece stayed up WAY too late last night. She was sleeping in class. Her friend sitting next to her attempted to revive her to no avail. Moments later, Mr. Stoll went to her table and (apparently) quite gently nudged her and revived her. **HA!!!! I got fifteen for two separate incidents (and ALMOST a third) in my day for less than that!!!**

A few years ago, I had a cousin who passed through the hallowed door of the science teacher. I would periodically hear her relate tales that would have led to her writing spelling words as well. I don't think she ever got the pleasure. To this day, I think Charnel was his pet. It sounds like he has another.

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## With A Little Bit O' Luck

One of my best [friends](#) posted on his blog that readers would get "bored" with his posts about his family and his love of it. However, I think it would be highly entertaining. I hope I don't bore anyone with my occasional posts about my awesome friends. Tonight, a bunch of us met at their house for an Oscar party. I must say that I was shocked after the final tally in which I was the winner. I usually don't do too badly at these things... I am pleased if I get a quarter of the categories correct. I do have a system that mainly involves paying attention to the news a week or two before the awards and I go from there. Luckily, *Slumdog Millionaire* did not let me down for the most part. In fact, I think I went against the movie a few times and lost.

There were a few sure things. I honestly thought that Heath

Ledger MADE the Joker his own. An interesting point was made tonight. Does anyone recall the villain falling to his death in the theatrical release? If so, it was apparently edited out of the DVD release. Definitely a bittersweet victory. The Clown Prince of Crime was the best part of *The Dark Knight*.

Also, who would not vote for *Wall-E*? While I am a fan of two-d animation of old, I think studios like Pixar create very fun, noteworthy work.

I have often thought that costume pieces are the way to go when choosing whic Costume Design movie to pick. Thank goodness *The Duchess* kept that belief alive.

As for the rest, many of them were pure pull them out of the hat guesses... some good... others not so good. Guess I was just lucky.

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## Who's Watching the Kids?

Tonight, I offered to sit with four of the best kids ever (I'm not going to be biased... since I do have several nieces and nephews who also qualify). My friends had yet to see the theatre's hilarious production of [Over the Tavern](#) so I said I would be happy to watch the little ones. After rehearsal, I headed over and we went to dinner before the show. By dinner's end, the two youngest had zonked out. I was slightly worried about Dis but I knew that "Goose" would help with her if the need presented itself. Some of the highlights included artistry courtesy of the aquadoodle... very nice, no mess as the special markers only work on the mat. We also had a session of school (I actually remember playing school? growing up). The three of us later settled down to watch the Disney version

of Tarzan. Shortly after changing Beeber's soaked diaper, C&L got back to find Sammers (surprise, surprise... but honestly, she was great) being the sole survivor until moments later when Dis decided to reawaken (hopefully, she did not keep them up too long).

A bit later, I asked if they had heard about Joaquin Phoenix's interview on [David Letterman](#) a few nights ago. Really, it made the Farrah Fawcett interview of a few years ago look good. Dave even commented that they owed Farrah an apology. Honestly, I'm not sure whether or not Joaquin's "absence" was chemically induced or he is just REALLY not comfortable giving interviews. Whatever the case, the segment is sure to cause a great deal of controversy for sometime.

Just had a very fun evening being a kid.

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## Walzing On The Trolley

Today was one of those hectic, busy days that I just love. Work til 2 then immediately have to make my way to rehearsal. Fortunately, the time clock is set 5 minutes fast. Rehearsal was just as fun as I had imagined it would be. The principal cast and members of the chorus were given a lesson in waltzing by the choreographer. Actually not as bad as I had feared although it was only a rudimentary lesson. In the ballroom scene, Grandpa actually has to appear to be moving somewhere during his graceful dance with Esther. We also got to watch the big chorus number on board the trolley begin to take shape. Just so long as it isn't a bunch of people sitting on board moving up and down, up and down to simulate the movement. While listening to chorus members practice, one of the male singers was asked which part he sang... Bass. And by

golly, he was indeed a bass. I could never in my wildest dreams hit some of the notes he was able to. There are basses and then there are BASSES!!!

Then it was over my home theatre where we were having three meetings as well as a surprise 21st birthday party for a dear friend who is in Over the Tavern. Apparently, she was surprised because she was amazed that I could keep a secret. I just told her that I had to come over for the meetings.

Following the meetings, some of us went across the way to eat. I had no money with me... something about misplacing my wallet. This never happens to anyone else, right? I did find it when I returned home.

OK... The End of The Spy Who Loved Me

*James Bond Will Return in*

*For Your Eyes Only.*

But he returned in Moonraker (yuck) first.

Happy 21st, Megan.

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## **I Need To Know About A Super Weekend Under The Sea**

This weekend has been one of the busiest but most fun I have had in sometime. It all started Thursday night when a group of us met at the theatre to practice singing the songs we had selected for our concert on Saturday night. I did not get to practice mine because circuits got crossed and the clip that

held the accompaniment to my piece was not there. But it was fun to see some of the others practice. Chris practiced his two selections from [Jekyll & Hyde](#). I had forgotten that the song "I Need to Know" (one of my favorites from the show) had eventually been taken out of the Broadway production. It was replaced by "Lost in the Darkness" which is sung by Jekyll over his comatose father. I often listen to the Anthony Warlow Gothic Musical Thriller version and find it far superior. Chris also shone brightly on "Confrontation" which is sung toward the end of the musical as Jekyll battles the evil that has risen to the surface and is about to totally consume him.

On Friday morning, I had to go to church to practice singing the songs I would lead the congregation in Saturday night. Then I returned home to practice the song I eventually chose to perform Saturday night at the theatre. When I decided to sing this weekend, I had two selections picked out that were very special to me and I thought would challenge me; however, they were deemed "not modern enough." The theme for the concert was musicals of the past decade. I eventually chose "Under the Sea" from *The Little Mermaid*. Very fun piece. However (and I don't know why it bothers me), I was not able to memorize the entire piece. But I had fun with it and heard many compliments from some close friends and also from newcomers to the theatre group. Megan even noted that she could see me one day performing the role of Sebastian on stage. Another great character with not one but two very memorable songs. Carol also expressed an interest in eventually performing a duet with me in the near future. I would relish the opportunity to perform a duet with Chris and one with Carol. I loved Carol's duet of "Feed the Birds" from *Mary Poppins*. The song really lends itself well to beautiful harmonies. I must say that all of the performers as well as the MCs were very good and the evening was a great success.

Super Bowl Sunday found me at work then immediately onto



rehearsal. We got to watch some of the choreography begin to take shape. One of the signature pieces from *Meet Me in St. Louis* is the "Trolley Song." Just in the beginning of the staging of the song, I can see that it will be very intensive but fun. However, Grandpa does not get to ride the car. After rehearsal, I made my way to a game party. I thought the game was good; sad to say the team I picked was not victorious but it is always fun to watch the game with a large group of friends as spirited as mine. I will watch the Super Office Special episode tomorrow.

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## A Tale Of Ponder-grossa and Wally World

This morning, I was treated to a story by the boss involving a dinner at an area steakhouse (one of my least favorite places). The couple went to an area Ponderosa and Unfortunately for them, chose the WRONG place to sit. Sitting at a table near them was a rather large, loud, and unruly bunch. She even commented that it made a Shaffer gathering seem tame ("Hardy-har-har-har"). As the dinner progressed, the neighboring party kept throwing biscuits at each other. Diane's husband commented that if one happened to hit him he would go to the other table and throw it at the adult(?) at the table along with a few epithets (there's your .50 word for the day). Soon after, one of the flying biscuits ricocheted off one of the children and came within inches of hitting Tony... did not hit him. Seconds later, a three year old got hold of a lemon and threw that. Not sure how close that got. I'm not sure why no one complained about the crowd, I guess it has been a while since I have eaten at a Ponderosa, but see little has changed.

Which brings me to my second tale of this post. It seems that my father was shopping in my FPOE. He was looking for a bottle of shampoo which my mother had run out of in her beauty salon. Dad, bless him, has a real problem tracking things down. If he does not know exactly what he is looking for and where it is at... forget it. He eventually used his cell phone to call and say he could not find it. Why not ask an associate you ask? AHHA, HE DID. Apparently, he picked the wrong associate because they were "TOO BUSY" (direct quote) to assist him. WHH000AAAAHHH... WAIT A MINUTE!!!! It is a good thing I was not with him because the first thing I would have done is gently tell this associate that he would help me or I would go to another associate to see if they were too busy. I know your boss and I am sure that he would be willing to help me. I have been thinking about doing some investigating by going to the store one Wednesday evening to see who was working in the Health and Beauty Department and see if they are too busy. It could be that the associate was busy, but that is certainly no way to treat ANY customer aside from the fact that they are in there at least once a week and drive 12 miles to get there. Dad did eventually find the shampoo after Mom described the bottle to him over the phone. It's been a while since [taylhis'](#) last WM post... thought I would contribute.

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## Getting Exactly What Was Advertised

A group of friends and I attended an area talent showcase of extremely gifted teenagers. Who says that tomorrow's leaders are destined for failure? Sponsored by a local church, many of the acts were religious in theme from very powerful

interpretive dance/signing to an intriguing dramatic presentation. However, there were a few pianists, a very talented violinist, and some EXCEPTIONAL female vocalists. One of the worship bands who performed, Exclamation, featured a friend who is a regular member of our game night and has been on stage several times. I sat beside her father and I could tell that [j](#) was as proud as can be of his youngest as was I. One of the critiques made by the judges was that their diction was TOO crisp?! That caused me to raise an eyebrow. I cannot tell you how many times I have been told to ENUNCIATE almost to the point at which I was over enunciating. I can see instances where dialect in a song would cause diction to be stressed differently, but the song Exclamation sang definitely was not one. I wonder if the group's mentor had been sitting in the audience and what her reaction was.

One of the solo vocalists I have had the pleasure of performing in ensembles with previously. She sang a glorious rendition of "Think of Me" from *Phantom of the Opera*. This junior in high school is already a three-year member of an area city's opera. She definitely has a very bright future ahead of her.

I was also greatly impressed by an 11th grader who chose to perform an aria, [Amarilli, mia bella](#). I did not begin singing Italian art pieces until after high school with a trained vocalist. This young lady commented that she had received a LITTLE(?) training.

There were other performers who played an instrument that in my opinion must be learned from birth. I greatly admire anyone who can come close to mastering ANY stringed instrument. A junior in high school performed her violin solo seemingly flawlessly.

I must say that some of the interpretive dances were perhaps some of my favorite segments... even if one of the groups seemed to be toted higher than the others as they were formed from

young members of the evening's sponsoring church. Another of the groups performed to "You Raise Me Up." This song is very special to me as it was the last song that I worked on under Emily's tutelage and I don't think I gave it its true potential. This is definitely a song that I would like to revisit, I think I am ready to.

So, our little corner of the world does indeed possess some exceptional talent in our youth. What a blessing to have evenings such as this to showcase it. Although I knew going in that the evening would contain some religious flavor, I for one think that it had just a smidgen too much for my taste. Not enough to totally turn me off but I am sure that there were some in the audience who may have been a bit uncomfortable. I also grew weary of the panel of judges giving their critiques which did not always make sense although they were all three trained professionals in the field. Seventeen acts with critiques for each seemed to drag at times and the comments and the "stars" awarded did not always match up. Just give the critique and move on. And above all, eat the microphone. Plus, be sure to enunciate but not too much.

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## New Year First Post

Last night was another fantastic celebration at our semi-weekly gathering place. Everyone brought food or spirits to indulge in. Friends who do not usually frequent our game nights came to share in the festivities. I went with my lingering effects from a visit by Uncle Larry N. Gitis. Honestly, I feel fine but my voice says otherwise. I remember losing my voice years ago a few weekends before I auditioned for a summer position at Cedar Point. I made the audition,

sang my audition piece and was asked to come back a half-hour later for the dance portion of the try out. Unfortunately, my graceful choreographic ability failed to impress... their loss, right?

While playing charades, which my team was winning (thank you very much) the time had arrived to watch Ryan Seacrest announce the ball drop. Dick Clark made an appearance from the studio; however, the damage done by his stroke of a few years ago is still apparent. I noticed an almost plastic appearance to Mr. Seacrest. Not sure if it was the lighting or makeup but he just looked wierd. Speaking of charades, I do not think that the movie or novel Return of the King is obscure. It was a title given to one of the other two teams but I thought it was a very good suggestion. My gracefulness was put to good use in my acting out the movie title Last Tango in Paris.

Shortly thereafter, we read some Weakest Link questions. I tried to keep quiet to allow others to answer. However, I heard some moaners from the other players imploring me to wait until the question was read. Finally, we moved on to some Outburst, and thank goodness for the arrival of our final player because some of the questions were beyond my expertise. By the time we had arrived to an I.Q. testing game, I was lying on the floor.

But like last year, it was a great end to the old and beginning of the new. There was no other place I wanted to be. I hope everyone had an enjoyable and safe holiday season and wish everyone the best in 2009.