

Last Call For Haunted Houses!!

This weekend sees the last of the Halloween season of 2010. I always try my best to do as much Halloween and fall-related things as possible; I just love the season. This year I've been lucky enough to have gotten to try THREE haunted houses, and I will rate them here in case anyone has time to check any of them out. I would really like to fit in a few more or even a repeat visit to one I've already been to, but I have a jam-packed weekend planned with other fun stuff like Halloween parties and Trick-or-Treating.

A few weekends ago, we visited the Chicago area and were able to get to two haunted houses, both in the area where we were staying – Aurora. We would have liked to check out some other of the MANY haunted houses in the suburbs (as well as other entertainment offerings), but alas, we quickly ran out of time. So the haunted houses visited were:

[BASEMENT OF THE DEAD](#) – 42 W. New York St. Aurora IL 60502 - This is by far the best haunted house that I've ever been to. I've been able to visit here 2 years in a row, and it's gotten better with time. The makeup on the creatures is incredible – horror movie caliber – and the characters waiting to scare people waiting in line are great. They ALWAYS stay in character, which is very important, and they are creative in their scariness – much more than the typical monster or “BOO!” yelling psychopath. I tried to get video of the ultra-impressive 7+ foot tall monsters that hang around outside, but Basement of the Dead is located in downtown Aurora, so I had to help my husband navigate around the tricky one-way streets instead. A MUST SEE for any haunted house enthusiast! We will probably be making the trip next year, if not just for this haunted house alone; it's that good! 4!'s for fright out of 4.

MIDNIGHT MASSACRE – 3440 Odyssey Court Naperville IL 60540 – Well, there really isn't much to say about this lame attempt at a haunted house. I don't even think it was made less scary by our visit to Basement of the Dead before this one – it wouldn't have been any better even if we hadn't just visited a spectacular haunted house first. The scariest thing about Midnight Massacre was the hour and a half we waited in line, which was hidden from view when you buy your tickets. We got a bad clue when we saw a snack stand in line – you know they won't want you taking food or drink into their haunted house, so if they let you buy food and drink in line, you know you're going to have a long wait. And in this case, a long wait for what? The haunted house was not scary. This one did consist of actors (?) yelling cheesy things like "BOO!" There was a guy dressed like Freddy from Nightmare on Elm Street, and his "scare" was jumping up from a bed and yelling "Freddy!" We even had one actor apologize to us and say, "Hey, I tried." Talk about breaking character! But in a haunted house as bad as this one, it didn't really matter that he broke character, that wasn't the only thing wrong with it. The first part of it was a black light maze that was so obviously part of a lazer tag course – they didn't even try to hide it. But there weren't any monsters in it or anything. They had a couple of cool robots and animatronics, especially this one large dinosaur thing, but it was just a head, and they didn't do anything to cover up the robotic looking body. And the actors were terrible. Enough said about this one, not recommended – well, maybe for a kid's first haunted house. One ! (for effort I guess) out of 4!'s

[Leader's Family Farms](#) – near the intersection of Ohio State Route 24 and Henry County Rd. 16 near Napoleon, Ohio – I got to go into this haunted attraction with one of my youth group girls, and she was a screamer. It was a lot of fun, especially since the ghouls and monsters focused their attention on the screamer and left me alone! We did not have the time to check out their new haunted attraction,

PanDEMONium, but Screamacres was a nice haunted attraction as always. 3! out of 4! – Lots of the same old haunted house effects, but being outside and in the middle of nowhere certainly adds to the effect. I should also note that Leader's has activities for the entire family, every age group. Great fall fun to be had here.

Well, there you have it – those are the 3 I've gotten to this year. If you have the time and are looking for a good scare, I highly recommend Basement of the Dead in Aurora Illinois or Leader's Family Farm's Screamacres in Napoleon Ohio. I wish I had more time to visit more and get some reviews. Maybe some day I'll be able to get down to Columbus Ohio to go to [Dead Acres Haunted Hoochie](#); it looks very scary and really cool!

Anyone else think haunted houses should extend their seasons into November for those of us who are very busy in October taking kids trick or treating and to fall parties, etc?? I sure wish they would!!! Have a GREAT Halloween!!

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...