

# Happy Easter!

I was right about something – I said it was going to be a great weekend and it was, even now, Sunday afternoon, when it's time for the Easter comedown the kids get when their sugar highs from all that candy wear off!

We celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary (again!) Friday night with a game night, and as usual, we had lots of fun! Without announcing it to anyone, I decided to have a sort of Mexican theme, which simply meant making a taco dip and margaritas. It's not like I usually have themes for game night; I just happened to read a recipe for the taco dip earlier in the week, then we almost got the kids a snow cone machine which inspired the margaritas. Even though we didn't get the snow cone machine, my husband said we have a little device that crushes ice; except when it came time for the margaritas, he decided he didn't want to crush the ice, and we ended up with glasses full of crushed popsicles (?) instead. So anyway, I don't remember telling any of my friends it was Mexican game night, but about 4 of them showed up with salsa and/or taco dip! When the last person arrived a little late and brought salsa, we gave her a standing ovation – hey, most of us are theater people; it seemed like the thing to do! I forgot to mention that before the game night, we went to Walmart where they had an Easter bunny to visit. My youngest daughter was afraid of him, so that explains how I got in the picture:



Saturday the community theater had their first-ever Easter egg hunt. We were actually going to go to the drive-thru zoo / safari park in Port Clinton, Ohio, but we decided to stay and support the theater's egg hunt instead. And that was a great decision – the egg hunt was a blast! There were organized games for the older kids while the toddlers hunted, but our little 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  year old daughter, Disney, was a little shy about picking up the eggs. The eggs had prizes in them, ranging from candy to tickets for large prizes to coin dollars – and Disney got one of those! The older kids enjoyed a variety of games; including a relay race where they were to race to a table and finish two boxes of Peeps – no hands allowed! It was a riot!



The kids enjoyed doing an actual egg hunt, unlike at our town's annual Easter egg hunt where they've resorted to throwing candy on the floor of the middle school gym rather than try to plan around the weather every year and do it at a

playground where they can actually *hide* the candy. They even sold lunch, which was great because after the hunt, we were ready to take off for the zoo and the kids had already been fed!

So we got to the Toledo Zoo and it was a little less than two hours before closing, so we had to pick and choose exhibits to see. Our oldest daughter really enjoys the Aquarium, so we began in there, and made our way around the back half of the zoo, ending with the great apes. The orangutans were bedding down for the night, and the gorillas were eating – allowing for some great up close views since a few of them chose eating perches right in front of the viewing glass. Because the weather is getting nicer, many animals were outside, and we enjoyed activity from the tigers and sloth bears – one of which is our “friend” and enjoys smelling us through the glass and playing with dangling car keys and hats. My favorite animal of the day were the hippos – the Toledo Zoo has full-size, humongous hippos (not the smaller pygmy variety found in many zoos), and Saturday they were hungry! The keeper had them cordoned off while he put out their food, and we got to watch as he let them at it, one by one. The poor hippo who had to wait got anxious and was opening his mouth really wide and rolling over in the water – hippo version of begging, I guess... but after seeing that huge animal charge and buck in the water like that made me realize just how dangerous a boat ride on the Nile River would be!

The zoo closed, so we went to a few of my favorite types of stores – \$1 stores, which was lucky I thought because I was sure they would close around 6ish on a Saturday. I thought I remembered that about stores from my youth – I remember being disappointed about not being able to stay at the mall later on Saturdays... but I’m glad I was wrong and they were open until 9 because I was able to stock up on some snacks and birthday party goodie bag trinkets for our soon-to-be 5-year-old’s upcoming party. When we got home, I was dead tired, but I did

catch the end of an awesome Chicago Cubs game before playing Easter bunny. The Cubs came from behind the Milwaukee Brewers to tie up the game and then win it with an Alfonso Soriano home run – that guy is on fire this year!! We got the kids' Easter baskets ready and hid the non-perishable eggs and went to bed.

Sunday we let our baby wake us – usually my husband wakes with the baby and lets me and the other kids sleep in when possible. But today I wanted to be up in time to hide the real eggs, so we put our two youngest in the bath, started the coffee, and began hiding eggs. But not soon after, our oldest starting coming down the stairs, so we had to re-direct her and give her a “job” to do upstairs while we finished so she wouldn't see us. We had a great time, but my camera's battery died, so I don't have any pictures of that...

Then it was off to church to learn about the real reason we celebrate Easter (how did coloring eggs get involved anyway? Maybe something to look up later when the kids are in bed and the Cubs are creaming the Brewers!). I never get bored at church, but I do get awfully tired – today my coffee wore off despite the energizing music and the pastor's entertaining sermon involving hot dogs and Jesus, of course! I guess I just get so relaxed since I don't have to worry about any of the kids for an hour – that's a good thing! We did go to bed late last night though... maybe I'll catch a nap while the kids play Easter bunny to their pets. They are hiding carrots in plastic eggs for their rats and hiding dog treats in eggs for their dogs. The bird got a new toy also, but he screamed at me while I was doing laundry again, so he's back on the sh\*t list. My friend is running an 'ugly pet contest' for a play she's in, and I think I'm going to enter the bird for revenge – he's molting and his feathers are nappy right now – HA!

Happy Easter everyone!

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# Zoo Traveler

I really like to travel (NO FLYING THOUGH!), and we were fortunate enough to do lots of it – before we had so many little kids, of course. We still try to make a yearly trip to Florida, especially while we can still fit the entire family in one car – something that soon won't be easily accomplished as the kids grow older. At each travel destination, I have to admit that my favorite tourist attraction is always the local zoo. I made a list of all the zoos and/or wildlife parks I have visited, and I hope to add to it soon! Here is the list by state, country, or territory, followed by the city in which it's located. An asterisk following the zoo means it no longer exists. I put notes about some of the places in *italics* as sort of a guide in case you're interested in visiting one of those particular attractions and want some info straight from a tourist's mouth.

## **California:**

Sea World San Diego

San Diego Zoo

## **Canada:**

Bird Kingdom Niagara Falls Aviary, Niagara Falls, Ontario

Marineland, Niagara Falls, Ontario – *this place is very cool.*

*You can hand-feed deer, Beluga Whales or even Orcas (Killer Whales). You can throw food down to bears who beg and do tricks. There are also a variety of amusement park rides for the whole family. Look at me petting the Orca!*



**Washington, DC**

National Zoo

**Florida:**

Wooten's Wildlife Park, Florida Everglades – *a cool, family owned place where you can see animals on display; including alligators, crocodiles, and Florida panthers. You can also hold and feed baby alligators! I wonder if they still exist; their website hasn't been updated since '06!*

Sea World, Orlando

Gatorland, Orlando

Animal Kingdom, Orlando

**Idaho:**

Zoo Boise, Boise

**Illinois:**

Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield – *this is the zoo I grew up going*

*to. In the 80's when I was a frequent visitor, they had many 'celebrity' animals, with interesting stories to match.*

Shedd Aquarium, Chicago

Peoria Wildlife Park, Peoria

Cosley Zoo, Wheaton

Glen Oak Zoo, Peoria

Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield

*Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington – yuck, not one of my favorite places. Their tiger exhibits consisted of teeny tiny cages, and they had a really scrawny, terrible looking tiger, at least in the late '90's when we lived in the area. Hopefully they've cleaned the place up.*

Scovill Zoo, Decatur

### **Indiana:**

*Ft Wayne Children's Zoo – a perfectly sized zoo to visit with kids. They have a wide variety of animals and some nice exhibits. They just recently built a chair-lift type ride that will take you over the lion exhibit once it's finished – cool and scary at the same time!*

Potawatomi Zoo, South Bend

Fun Spot, Angola

### **Michigan:**

Binder Park, Battle Creek

### **Minnesota:**

Minneapolis Zoo, Minneapolis

### **Missouri:**

St Louis Zoo, St. Louis

### **Nebraska:**

*Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha – I know they've since rebuilt it, but when I visited back in 2001-2002, they had a teeny-tiny exhibit for the gorillas, which made them none too happy. I actually witnessed a huge male gorilla charge a kid and beat on the glass from his small exhibit – scary!*

Henry Doorly safari park, Omaha

Folsom Children's Zoo, Lincoln – *a very nice little zoo located in the heart of Lincoln. It's so well-laid out that you can forget you're in the middle of a capital city, and they have lots of animals in a variety of nice exhibits.*

### **Ohio:**

African Safari Wildlife Park, Port Clinton – *I love this place! You can feed deer, elands, huge buffalo and a variety of hoofed mammals from the comfort of your own vehicle. In season, they have pig races, animals shows, and camel and pony rides for the little ones.*

Akron Zoo, Akron – *I was really impressed with the layout, exhibits, and the happiness of the animals – a very impressive little zoo!*

Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland

Columbus Zoo, Columbus – *a zoo no one had heard about until my favorite celebrity, Jack Hanna got ahold of it and made it a world-reknown facility. Huge zoo, and the only place to see my favorite animals, manatees in my home state of Ohio!*

*\*Sea World Ohio, Aurora – we actually lived in Illinois at the time we visited here, but I'm glad we got to see it before they sold it to Six Flags, who sold it to Cedar Fair. Any of the other Sea Worlds are quite a hike from IL or OH for that matter, especially for a non-flyer such as myself.*

Toledo Zoo, Toledo

### **Pennsylvania:**

Pittsburgh Zoo – *very impressive zoo! Lots of kid-friendly playgrounds and interactive areas. The polar bear habitat looked really cool – people go through a tunnel that the bears can swim over – but we didn't see it since the bears weren't in the pool. I NEED a second look at this zoo and will definitely allow more time when I get back there!*

ZOOAMERICA North American Wildlife Park, Hershey – *We did not care for this zoo at all. We visited in the late '90's, so*



*maybe they've added more to it by now. But at that time, they only had animals indigenous to North America, and let's face it, those are easy to spot in most areas of the U.S. And let's face it, the real star tourist destination in Hershey is the chocolate factory!*

### **South Dakota:**

*Great Plains Zoo and Museum, Sioux Falls – I visited here with my family when I was 15. This place was amusing to us because attached to the zoo is the museum, which has many taxidermied specimens. We joked that this zoo had more dead animals than live ones!*

*\*Marineland, Rapid City – note the asterisk, this place doesn't exist anymore, thank goodness. When we visited in the summer of '93, they had dolphins and sea lions held in such tiny cages and pools, it was sickening. I haven't been able to find much info on this place, but I'm sure they were shut down because of poor treatment of their animals. I can only hope the animals found a better home.*

*Bear Country USA, Rapid City – a cool drive-thru bear habitat experience – keep those windows rolled up!!! And check out the baby bear nursery – so adorable!*

### **Wisconsin:**

*Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison*

*\*Serpent Safari, Wisconsin Dells*

### **GRAND TOTAL AS OF 2009:**

**41 animal-themed places in 2 countries, 13 states, 1 district... and counting!**

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# Saturday Slobber

Well, school starts on Tuesday, so for one last summery hurrah, we ventured over to the coastal cities in Ohio on Lake Erie for some fun. First stop was the African Safari Park in Port Clinton, which is really more of a drive-thru zoo than anything having to do with Africa. They do have zebras, giraffes, and camels, but most of their animals hail from North America. It's always an extremely fun experience, and we try to go every year. Since this summer was very busy with the new baby and all, it didn't occur to me that we hadn't gone yet until I struck up a conversation with a really nice elderly couple at a restaurant the other day. When I asked where they were from, they replied, "west of Cleveland", so that got me thinking about the Safari Park in Port Clinton. On the way home from the restaurant that night, I said to my husband, you know, we haven't been to the safari park this year... An idea was hatched, and there we were on Saturday with 6 of our closest friends.

Saturday morning was almost like a one-act play with all of us standing there on our front porch, trying to figure out who was going to ride with whom; we were trying to find the best way to do things to be as economically (and environmentally) friendly as possible... We ended up taking just 2 cars for the 12 of us, and then once we got to Port Clinton, it was like musical chairs (cars) once again while we tried to figure out how to position everyone to get the most bang for our buck, so to speak, since the safari place charges by carload *and* by individual...

So anyway, after a stop at Cheese Haven In Port Clinton – and now I have to go off on yet another tangent because Cheese Haven is \$000 good and totally worth a stop if you're in the area. And what I mean by "in the area" is anywhere up to 100 or even 1000 miles, depending on how much you like cheese. They have so many varieties, along with fresh jerkies and beef

sticks and other yummy treats. We stopped there to get our lunch of corned beef sandwiches – and they have the **best** corned beef sandwiches, yum. Unfortunately, I was not willing to take 4 kids into the cheese store to run around, so I was stuck in the car with the kids, but my oh-so-thoughtful hubby talked the worker into making me a sample bag (which they're not supposed to do, you only get the free samples if you go into the store, but hey, I was stuck in the car), AND he made my sandwich for me – how sweet ☐

Ok, tangent aside... now we've arrived at the Safari Park, and it is SO crowded... Makes me think twice about going there again next summer unless it's near their last weekend of operation like it was when we went last year... I mean, I just can't stand waiting in line to go to the bathroom, of all things... Waiting in line is not much fun at all, but when you're waiting in line to do something as necessary and as unrewarding as going to the bathroom, it's really annoying. So, because it was so crowded, it took us forever to get through the drive-through zoo part; although not as long as it took the other vehicle in our caravan because they were stuck behind an obscenely slow white van the whole time... So while we got out of the drive-through section, they had barely just begun... But the whole park is a really cool place; even more so if you don't care about the vanity nor cleanliness of your car since there are some rather huge creatures (including deer, elk, elands, buffalo, zebras, giraffe and longhorns) who drool, head-butt, lick, slobber, and basically invade your car as you drive through *their* habitat. I think you must truly be an animal lover to appreciate the place since you come out filthy... This was the first time we had been there in our new car, but I'm happy to report no major damage, that I know about, at least; but what's this about driving our car through a pond, jamiahsh?!?

We'll get to the bottom of that later... when you come out of the drive-through part, it's time for the walk-through zoo

section, and there they have monkeys, macaws (military, not green-winged as the sign said), ocelots, warthogs, alpacas, and tortoises; not to mention rides for the kiddies: ponies and camels. I noticed that they had 2 camels for riding; one was resting while the other gave the rides. But interestingly, one was a Dromedary and the other a Bactrian camel, the difference between the two species being mainly in how many humps they had... My daughters rode the Dromedary (1 hump), and they really seemed to enjoy themselves – I wonder if riding the Bactrian (2 humps) would have been any different? I was envious because I'm no where near the 125 lb. weight limit, so I'll probably never get to ride a camel... After that, we got to check out an animal show, ironically titled "Laugh With the Animals". It was ironic because our host for the show was so dry – she had the audience doing everything *but* laughing... It was a fun show, though, and something that we hadn't yet done at the park in our previous visits. Overall, an interesting day... as it is anytime you have 12 people on an outing together!

If you liked reading my synopsis of the day, check out my fellow tangents.org blogger and get Jamiahsh's take on the whole thing. I'm going to take a lesson from him and blog this in 2 installments... got to leave the readers craving more, so they say! Check out my next post for a full summary of our visit to a year-round haunted house – Ghostly Manor in Sandusky, Ohio! Until then...