

Zoo Snoozin' – Part 2 – And Then Some

Bright and early at 7am last Friday at the Toledo Zoo, we were gently awakened by one of our guides (or not-so-gently awakened at 5am by the screaming parrots if you were in the Michigan group sleeping in Nature's Neighborhood) after hitting the pillows at 1am just hours earlier. No problem, what better motivation could I have to get out of bed than already being IN the zoo? We got dressed and packed up our gear and headed to the Carnivore Cafe for a generous breakfast of bagels, cereal, yogurt, applesauce, juice, and coffee (thank goodness for that, and I chugged two cups for fuel). Oh yeah, if you're not a regular reader and happened upon this post unintentionally, then you probably don't know that I'm talking about the Zoo Snooze my daughters and I went to last week – [see installment one here](#).

After breakfast, we headed over to the gorilla exhibit, but we got stopped halfway there because there was mis-communication – we were supposed to be at the primate exhibit instead. So we did an about-face, and headed over to the primates to watch them play with our tubes we had made the night before. THEN we headed over to the gorilla exhibit, and we had to take the long way since they were re-doing the sidewalk between the primate and gorilla exhibits. For those of you who aren't familiar with the Toledo Zoo, there is A LOT of walking. Not as much walking between exhibits as other zoos, such as Brookfield Zoo near Chicago, but still a lot of walking. As frequent visitors to the Toledo Zoo, we've found ways of cutting down the mileage, especially when pushing the double stroller. But on the second day of the Zoo Snooze, we were all over the place. And I loved it. It was a nice day. My kids were tired, but I was rarin' to go, so I didn't even mind any of the detours. So we watched the gorillas play and

tussle over their enrichment treats, and we listened to the gorilla keeper tell us about their personalities. The gorilla troupe of Toledo holds a special place in my heart – their silverback (male gorilla leader) Kwisha, was born at Brookfield Zoo in 1988 – right about the time when I was a frequent visitor there as a child. I remember ogling the gorillas and especially the babies in the (then) new Tropic World exhibit, and it's quite probable that I admired Kwisha (who is the youngest and last son of Samson, a famous Brookfield silverback) way back when he was a gorilla tot.

After the gorillas, we had to walk across the zoo to the elephant exhibit (the long way, remember, because of the construction) to watch Louie play with our enrichment treats. Louie is the zoo's baby elephant – well, not so much anymore... he was celebrating his 7th birthday last week when we were there. I have a video of Louie popping our treat bags into his mouth – whole thing, bag and all without even opening it – but I put that in my previous post, so refer to the link above if you'd like to see it. And then it was time for the Zoo Snooze to end, and the gates to open and let the real visitors come into the zoo.

So we hiked back to the car, and we got many a strange look from regular zoo-goers who were wondering why we were carrying sleeping bags and backpacks and pillows. We stashed our stuff and spent some time in the gift shop, which is not normally something I do on zoo trips, but it was a nice change of pace. Besides, I was missing my little ones so much, and I had that zoo membership card burning a hole in my pocket – I just had to buy them something. At this point, it was starting to get rather warm outside, and my kids were exhausted. The rest of the group was going quite well, but my kids kept asking if we had to go back into the zoo. Keep in mind that we come often, so they were old hats at the zoo who were extremely tired. I patiently explained that we were going to do whatever the people who we were riding with were

going to do, and that was that. As it was though, everyone was exhausted and the people we rode with seemed to be asking us for permission to **not** go back into the zoo. FINE with us! I explained – not because I had had enough of the zoo – that would never happen, no matter how little sleep I'd had... but I wanted to be on their schedule, plus I had the potential for two very tired and crabby kids on my hands AND a trip to Illinois scheduled for the next day. We ended up staying on the side of the zoo where our car was parked (Toledo Zoo straddles the Anthony Wayne Trail – a major thoroughfare, and the zoo has a walkway above it. But it requires a lot of walking to get from side to side, and most of the exhibits are located on the opposite side of the parking lot), so stayed on the one side and still got to see the Polar Bears, Wolves (who were passed out because of the heat), giraffes, and zebras. And then it was time to go.

During the entire Zoo Snooze, I had planned on napping the whole way home, but I found myself having an intriguing conversation with our drivers instead. We arrived home about 5pm, and I unpacked and then I re-packed for the trip to Illinois the next day and made up some lost time with my little ones. By the end of the night, I was seeing things and not making much sense because I was so tired, but it was well worth it!

We awoke bright and early Saturday morning and left at 8am headed for Chicago, and wouldn't you know it – a traffic snarl. It was too early for the kids to nap, and they were awesome in the car – at least until we hit stop and go traffic just outside the Loop. An hour and 4 miles later (yes, you read that right – it took us an **hour** to go **four** miles!), we discovered the reason for our delay – a bridge had begun to crumble, so they had to close down 2 lanes to repair it, which left all the traffic to merge into ONE lane. Ah, Chicago traffic, don't you love it? NOT!!!

The kids were pretty great during all of this, as was I for

running on fumes – I think I was still high off my Zoo Snooze. They did start to lose it a little, but luckily I had some powdered donuts packed, so between those and the Veggie Tales dvds I put into the car's player, we managed to not kill each other. We arrived at my mother-in-law's house 55 minutes late, even after Jill the GPS had predicted us getting there an hour early all morning. This would have been fine, except that my mother-in-law had previous plans, so we got to see her for a whopping 15-minute-hi-goodbye-here's-this-here's-that-I-love-you-hug-kiss-goodbye session while my husband's sister and brother-in-law managed to avoid us completely... long story, there's bad blood there, but I thought we were over it by now. Guess not. Whatever. We moved on to a local Chicago beef place (NOTE to non-Chicagoans – just because you call it Chicago Beef, **a French Dip IS NOT CHICAGO BEEF** no matter how hard you try!!) where we shared great food and even better conversation with a friend from way back, Derek – SO glad he called us and that the traffic jam didn't ruin this part of our trip!

Our next stop was my Grandpa's nursing home, and that was awesome. It's pretty much on the way from my husband's family's house to my family's house, and I wouldn't dream of going to Illinois without seeing him, especially since my grandparents do not travel and have never been to our home in Ohio. Going to ~~Hellinois~~ Illinois is the only way I can see them and so every time I'm in the area, I make sure to stop by and let our kids have a visit with their great-grandparents. My little boy, who will be 2 in July, had a special buddy in my grandmother; it was really sweet, and I don't even know why. But we were there for over an hour, and the whole time, he kept saying "Grandma! Grandma!" making sure that she was doing everything right along side him. My grandpa made me a bet – will the Chicago Cubs (my team – he is a St. Louis Cardinals fan) or the Chicago Bears (a football team, also a favorite of his and my husband's, for that matter) win their respective championship first – World Series or Superbowl?

Stay tuned to find out... ☐

Next it was on to my sister's house, where there was a birthday party for my nephews who both have April birthdays - they turned 2 and 7 this year. It was a great party; a wonderful chance to see family; immediate and also my sister's in-laws who are very nice and interesting people to chat with. My sister's nephew is my oldest daughter's age (10), and he has been interested in the weather since he was about 3 years old. His hero is Tom Skilling, a local Chicago WGN weatherman, one whom I've always liked also. Tom always teaches about the weather and its systems and patterns rather than just simply forecasting it. But anyway, my sister's nephew has his own weekly weather newsletter that he writes and send electronically himself, so I put myself on his mailing list. When I got the newsletter this week, I was impressed - just as I was when talking to the little guy and being dwarfed by his weather knowledge. As is usual, my kids had such a wonderful time with their cousins that they hid when it was time to leave, and we had to dig them out, this time out from under my sister's bed. I'm done with being embarrassed about this; especially since my sister dug up some memories of us hiding from our parents while playing with our cousins! I don't remember this, but I'll take her word for it...

Anyway, time got away from us, and we left my sister's house at 9pm - which was 10pm Ohio time. Arrived home at 2:30 in the morning and had two crazy dogs and some kids to put to bed, and we begrudgingly gave up our church dreams for Sunday. But lo and behold, we were all up and ready for church on Sunday, so we went, and almost one busy week later, I'm still catching up on sleep as I write this, no surprise there. But thanks for reading my rambling, and may this Mother's Day find you blessed, happy, and healthy - hope you have a good one!!

Zoo Snoozin!

Last week I got an email from my friend Carol – she had planned a field trip to the zoo for a ‘Zoo Snooze’ and a few of her students backed out at the last minute. Since the trip was pre-paid, the spots were paid for, and Carol wanted to fill them – so she thought of me, her friend, the zoo lover, and I of course JUMPED at the opportunity!

I took my two oldest daughters since the age requirements for the trip excluded my 3-year-old Disney and of course my almost 2-year-old, who I wouldn’t have wanted along anyway. Poor Hubby had to stay home with the little ones, and how I missed him! (and the little ones) But other than that – Best. Zoo. Trip. EVER!!!

Because of legality reasons, my daughters and I were not allowed to ride the school bus with the rest of the group. So my friend Carol graciously arranged for us to ride with one of her student’s parents who were chaperoning – they were the nicest people! They were actually going to take their pickup truck, but upon learning that they’d have 3 hitchhikers, they switched vehicles to their SUV without complaint – how accommodating! We followed the bus to the zoo, and we hiked across the zoo carting our sleeping bags, pillows and backpacks, and I was EXCITED beyond belief!! We set down our stuff in Nature’s Neighborhood (where the birds were screaming) and walked over to the primate building where we got to watch the primates after zoo hours and listen to a zookeeper talk about her interactions with the primate families. We then went into the Museum of Science building (this is at the Toledo Zoo, don’t know if I mentioned which zoo it was...) into a classroom in the basement to listen to a worker tell about 3 animals – a box turtle, a salamander, and

a rat (my girls were more than happy to volunteer the info that they had FOUR pet rats at home!). After listening to facts about the animals, we got to touch them, and I had already promised myself I would touch it no matter what – not a big deal, I love animals, so I don't have a problem touching regardless of species... except for my fear of frogs, but had there been a frog, I was going to touch it! We switched classrooms and did the same thing with 3 more animals: a cockroach, an agama (type of lizard – cute!), and a fox snake. Because the group sizes for Zoo Snoozes are supposed to be 25-50 people, they had actually paired our group of 11 with a rather large school group from Northern Michigan. When we were in the classrooms doing the animal activities, they separated our groups, and I was so glad because it would have been difficult for our kids to see and touch the animals if we were still combined with the huge Michigan group.

Next we went to the Carnivore Cafe (used to be an exhibit building that housed animals and they left some of the cages up for kids to eat in – they get a big kick out of this) for our snack of pizza, raisins, juice, and animal cookies.



the kids eating in an
animal cage at the
Carnivore Cafe

We then went for a night hike, and walking around the zoo in the dark under the full moon was amazing. We could hear the lions roaring, the snow leopards making cat noises, and when

we walked past the cheetah exhibit, they were quite active. One sprayed a tree, and then he began stalking us, slowly walking toward us and then running at us and jumping on the fence! I didn't have my camera out when he jumped at the fence, but here he is stalking us – listen for the little cheetah “meow” at the end:

The zookeeper said that the cheetahs like to stalk toddlers who can barely walk, and they especially have fun with this during the zoo's Halloween celebration when parents bring their kids who dress up like cute and cuddly things – like little bunnies or other tasty cheetah snacks.

So we took a night hike to the aquarium, and it was neat to see the keepers turn on the lights for us. Even the fish were acting differently at night – some fish appeared that we don't normally see during the day when we come, and others were swimming in schools when they don't usually do that during the day.

After the night hike, we made enrichment treats for the animals – there were four to choose from: melon bombs for the elephants (you make holes in watermelons and stick carrot sticks in there), pumpkin cookies and paper towel tubes for the primates, and snack bags for the elephants. My oldest daughter made primate tubes, and Sammie and I made elephant snack bags – you put an apple, a pear, and a handful each of peanuts and popcorn in the bags and roll them shut and decorate them. We were incredibly surprised the next morning when we watched Louie the elephant (and it was his 7th birthday!) take our treat bags and pop the whole things into his mouth (bags and all!) without even opening them first! Here is a video of Louie eating our bags – too bad I couldn't get out from behind the girl with the ponytail:

After making the enrichments, we went back to a classroom and played an animal training game using a training clicker – I have to get myself one of those and follow the puppy around for a day or two to housebreak him! Wonder when I'll find the time for that? After the game, it was finally time for bed, and we got to choose if we wanted to separate from the Michigan group. We chose yes, leaving them to sleep with the screaming parrots – I get enough of that at home! And sure enough, they reported to us the next day that the birds were up and screaming at 5am. I would not have been too happy about that, especially since we didn't get to bed until 1am! So we took our stuff and slept in one of the classrooms in the basement of the Museum of Science which was pretty neat – it's a well-kept 1930's Works Progress Association building, and we got to wander the winding basement hallways back and forth to the bathroom. Never mind that the building is home to hundreds of frogs and toads – they were upstairs, and I didn't give them any thought.

I think I will end it here and save day 2 of the Zoo Snooze for another post – this turned out to be a rather long post, and even though it's difficult for me to understand, not everyone loves zoos as much as I do. I don't want to bore the heck out of anyone!