

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
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At Least I Have No Regrets

Spring break is over, and for me it flew by- and it was wonderful. I had my concerns about being so tired and keeping 4 kids from getting bored and restless, and those fears mounted last week when I saw the weather forecast – 40s all week, scarce sunshine, and maybe even a little snow. I was especially concerned that spring break would be my own personal forecast to what summer break will be like because hard as I try not to, I have times where I dread the summer a little bit.

For one thing, there is a wonderful Christian camp that we've been hearing about from a friend, and we've been trying to let our kids go for years now, but it hasn't worked out for one reason or another. This year, it seems that the dates will work, but the fees are a little steep, and the 45-minute trip to the camp x4 (there-back-there-back for two kids) might hurt the wallet a little bit with the price of gas the way it is. Add to that a trip to Nashville Indiana with extended family – SO fun, but 8 more hours of driving, plus groceries and supplies to buy, plus 4 round-trips to South Bend Indiana, and I calculated my mileage from July 4-23 at 1388 – That's one thousand eighty-eight miles in 20 days. Factor in our van's crummy gas mileage and all the pregnant lady bathroom stops, and OUCH. But then I got to thinking about it, and I think I'd rather spend my July driving around the tri-state area than locked away in my air-conditioning with 4 rambunctious

kiddos. As I said, the trip to Nashville will be lots of fun, and most expenses have been paid thanks to a generous Christmas gift. So what if I have to miss the 4th of July fireworks for one year (next year we do have to pick a different date though guys if you are reading this ☐ 4th of July is one of my favorite holidays!). And the trips to South Bend mean that Grandma is taking the kids – so that means fun for them, and a break for us. So what if it's not all 4 kids gone at the same time anymore – that's just one of the small trade-offs for having such a large (wonderful) family. And I'm STOKED that the kids finally get to go to this camp – they are so excited too! So what if we have to leave Nashville at 5am just to drive the 4 hours to get Sammie there on time? But the main reason for optimism for summer vacation was spring break – it was awesome, and it flew by.

For me, the month of March dragged on and on, and I think much of it had to do with my prenatal dr. appointment on the 31st. I just could not wait. Part of it was excitement – this stage of pregnancy is tough in a different way than the rest of it because many of the changes are internal, and you have nothing to show for it. I spend my time looking up sketches of what my baby might look like these days, but unless you count fatigue, nausea, moodiness, or tears, there aren't any outward signs to get excited about – and no, leftover baggage from previous kids does not count as a “baby bump”. Also, I've been extra worried about this pregnancy – I can't put my finger on it, maybe it's that stupid stat I heard somewhere that keeps sticking in my brain – “1 out of 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage”. This is my 5th pregnancy, so that panics me. I wish I didn't read the news so much. Maybe the worry is because of how incredibly difficult this pregnancy has been on me (and my family) compared to the others. Whatever it is, I've been especially panicked, but I've been building a great relationship with my new doctor – she is very understanding and so much more of a problem solver than my previous doctor. But either way, spring break saw me at my prenatal, and

everything looks great! Baby is measuring at exactly 12 weeks, right where s(he) should be. AND... I got to see her (him) dance!! The baby keeps sneaking us ultrasounds – I wasn't scheduled for one, but the heartbeat couldn't be detected (my understanding doctor warned me of this ahead of time, or I would have panicked. Again.), so she took me into the ultrasound room. There, we saw baby on the screen, and my little 2-inch miracle was *dancing* – I saw her legs moving and everything! I keep thinking and saying "she" and "her", but don't place any bets – I've been known to be wrong about my children's genders in the past – *before* they're born, of course, sheesh.

So I took the kids to the zoo on Monday of this spring break, and last night I'm still on cloud nine from seeing my baby dance, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I could not resist going back to the zoo on the last day of our season's pass. We aren't going to renew because as much as I love the zoo, it feels like a waste to renew right before summer, especially when I'm pregnant and (probably?) won't feel like going as much. And I know I won't be able to go after my surgery for a month or so... So I took the kids to the zoo not once, but twice this spring break, and I didn't even feel like I was going to keel over by the end of today, which means that my first trimester fatigue *might* be fading (afraid to get too excited). I even took an extra kid with me to the zoo both days, a gamble that paid off both times since we all had a blast – even if I was late getting Ellyn home today (that's why I didn't stop to chat Justj – I've been kicking myself ever since. I really wanted to see your daughters! But I was late, and you just don't expect to run into a friend 60 miles from home so I was caught off-guard).

So yes, I missed the Chicago Cubs opening day game taking my kids to the zoo, and I'm proud of it! Nevermind that I was looking forward to that game for months. Hubby recorded it for me, and I watched it as soon as I got home anyway. And

I'm telling you what, the Cubs did not play badly (except for Dempster – if I still cussed he would be on my you-know-what-list), but they lost. But as I said, they did not play badly, so there is MUCH hope for the season – you can't tell anything decisive on opening day. Well, except for last year but we'll leave that out of it. But the best part is, I have no regrets. I can't imagine how I would have felt had I missed my last chance to take my kids to the zoo in order to watch a game where the Cubs lost.

Super decision on my part, and if this spring break was any kind of predictor for summer vacation, BRING IT ON!

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!

Back To Blogging

It seems like I haven't had the time to blog as much as I'd like to lately. Put it this way – Halloween ended over a week ago now, and I still have a draft sitting here detailing how my family spent what's probably our 2nd favorite holiday. I think I will quickly summarize and get it churned out next, hopefully.

One thing that's been taking up my blogging time is laundry. When the seasons change, my laundry responsibilities increase from about 3 loads per week to 6 or 7. That's because my family of 6 is now wearing pants instead of shorts or sundresses, many of us dress in layers in the fall which adds sweatshirts to the mix, and then there are the added number of blankies that the kids use when it turns cold outside. The good news of all this is that when spring turns to summer, I find myself with about half the laundry I've gotten used to doing in the winter – kind of a fall back, spring ahead-type thing for laundry, I guess. But more laundry folding and less blogging for me in the mean time.

And that reminds me, a funny thing happened at church yesterday. When my class got back to our classroom after large group, there were 2 new kids sitting there. I introduced myself, and we were just getting started when their dad came to the door, seemingly embarrassed and very apologetic as he asked for his kids back – turns out their family had forgotten to set their clocks back an hour, so they were actually there for the next service ☐

Our family remembered to change our clocks, but we didn't get to appreciate the extra hour of sleep it was supposed to bring – kids have biological clocks, they wake up at the same time every day regardless of what the clock says or what time zone they are in. This is especially good advice if you're going to travel with kids across time zones – don't fool yourself into thinking that your kids will adjust to the local time when you travel, or you could be in for a not-so-pleasant surprise. My wonderful, thoughtful husband is always the one who gets up early with the kids, but I had to be at church at 8:30 yesterday. Also, I was up all night with a killer headache – now that was strange.



I am very lucky to be able to say that I very rarely get headaches. If I don't get enough sleep, I will have a dull ringing in my head, but nothing like Saturday night's doozy that was actually waking me up throughout the night. Luckily it went away (with help) before I arrived in my classroom full of 1st graders. But I have to wonder about

the cause of this colossal headache – could it perhaps be some kind of weird virus that had me laid up all weekend? Saturday I was knocked flat on my back by a sudden and severe mysterious back pain. It began on Friday, when I decided to take my kids to the zoo since they had a day off school. By the time we were ready to leave, I couldn't bend over and had to ask for help to tie my shoes. I thought maybe it was a pulled muscle or something, maybe a cramp that would work itself out – I couldn't remember injuring it. But I did not enjoy myself nearly as much as I usually do at the zoo ☐ And thank goodness Hubby decided to come with or I don't know how I would have been able to handle 5 kids (my daughter's friend came along) by myself without hardly being able to bend or move right. When we got home, Hubby had some work to catch up on, and I fell asleep on the couch while waiting for him – something I haven't done for ages which makes me realize that I didn't feel too well on Friday. Then Saturday dawns, and I can't get out of bed because of the extreme pain every time I tried to bend. So I stayed in bed until 1:30 – played my cards right and got lunch in bed too ☐ – when we absolutely had to leave to meet our youth group kids for a service project. I got the easy job – waiting for the kids who were late – while the others raked leaves and picked up litter, and while I took it easy, my back started to feel better. But then came the headache which was to plague me all night. What makes me think this is a virus is because of all the stuff going around lately, plus the fact that my sister had this same exact sudden backache a few weeks ago – could it be a contagious 'backache virus'? I owed my parents an email, but I couldn't get in front of the computer with my sore back, so I called them from bed Saturday morning, and that's how I found out about my sister. Anyway, my point is, it was a busy weekend, but also one where I couldn't get to my computer even if I had had the time, hence the slow pace of the blogging.



And speaking of things going around... my parakeet JJ is feeling much better. He's even chirping again!! He hasn't lost his balance while sitting on his perch in days, and his physical appearance is starting to look healthier. The lady at the pet store said that if a little bird is fluffed up and at the bottom of his cage like JJ was that it's almost always too late to save them, so I feel really great that my little guy seems to have another chance. I guess I should have bought this really cool looking toy I saw the other day, but my husband and I have a policy that we try not to buy anything unless we have an immediate use for it. This thing was a \$10 cabinet – you install it in your living room or somewhere; it's a nice looking wood cabinet, and it opens into a little play yard for small birds. Ugh, just writing about it makes me want it, but the store was an hour away, and JJ is a cage bird – I don't know that he would come out to play in a play yard. I think of him as so fragile, so it would be difficult for me to make him come out; I sure wouldn't want him to get sick again.

Well, anyway, I've rambled enough – guess I just wanted to share my relief at getting well and of being able to blog again. Until that overdue Halloween post...

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...

Meet Marty

Question: What's the best way to dislodge me from a "case of the Mondays"?

Answer: A surprise trip to the zoo on a work day, of course! Hubby knows me so well ☐

Tangent: If you have your own "case of the Mondays", rent the movie Office Space – it's hilarious!

So we took off Monday for the zoo, and we were torn between which side of the zoo to visit – Toledo Zoo straddles a major highway, the Anthony Wayne Trail, and we never visit both sides in the same day because it adds a TON of walking, much of it up long ramps pushing a heavy double stroller. We usually park in the back and opt for the larger side of the zoo, but we have been visiting a lot lately, and since it was a work day and Hubby had to get home at a somewhat decent hour to get back to work, we opted for the smaller side of the zoo. This side might not have many exhibits, but there is this almost-year-old baby polar bear that I've been wanting to see, so it seemed like the right choice – until we saw the sign at the gate that read, "Our baby polar bear, Siku, will not be on exhibit today." WHAT?!? Well, we had already parked, unloaded kids, and walked into the zoo, so visiting the other side was no longer an option. We trudged on, determined to make the best of it.

And lucky us, it all worked out wonderfully! We may not have

gotten to see a super-cute baby polar bear, but we got to see a full-grown male polar bear up close, nose to nose – I'm talking within inches. Sure, there was a pane of glass separating us from the polar bear, but that's a given – look at this:

In case you're wondering, Marty the polar bear (Siku the cub's dad) has a bucket containing frozen fish in an ice block. We watched him conquer the first bucket and devour the fish, and then he bullied the 2nd bucket away from the other polar bear and worked on it for a good 30-40 minutes – we had to leave before he got to the fish from the 2nd bucket. I could not decide which video was best, so I'm just going to post all 4 – they're all under a minute long anyway so they don't take forever to unload off my camera. All of the videos were taken while Marty was working on the 2nd ice bucket. You can see how he dips the bucket in the water and even dives into the water with the bucket in his mouth in order to let the water loosen up the fish ice block for him.

In case you're wondering, being up close and personal with a thousand pounds of polar bear (give or take a few hundred pounds) is really as amazing as it looks!!!

And my two little ones had a great time also – at first my son was afraid of the polar bear, but he got over that once he realized that Marty was much more interested in his bucket than some zoo visitors. Here are the kids posing in an “arctic cave”:



And the kids' favorite part of the day? Climbing on and posing on this mock dung heap near the giraffe exhibit. Kids – gotta love 'em!



Playing Tourist In Toledo

It began with terrible news – my husband's uncle had a massive heart attack and was in a coma. His uncle was in Youngstown Ohio, on his way from Illinois to Washington DC where he was going to take his two sons for a vacation. A week ago Sunday, we packed up our family and were ready to head to Youngstown to be with the boys since they didn't have any other family in the area, but at the last minute, we found out that their mom was on her way.

We were all packed and ready to go, plus the summer almost got by without us taking a family vacation. Sure, we had some fun excursions with extended family and friends, but nothing with all 6 of us, just the 6 of us. So we changed our destination from Youngstown to Toledo, cut out a bunch of that driving, and were able to utilize a hotel gift certificate that had been burning a hole in our pockets. Although Toledo is not our home town, we live only an hour away so we visit often, which is why I used the term 'playing tourist'.

We went to the zoo (for the umpteenth time, but I could never get sick of the zoo, NEVER!), ate some delicious food, and swam in the hotel pool a bunch. We visited a mall; something I haven't done in probably over a decade (I don't count our local mall – it's more than half vacant, and its food court has only one restaurant left!), and I was disappointed to learn that the mall's Dippin' Dots store (which is the only one anywhere nearby) DOES NOT carry my favorite flavor – Root Beer Float! But the Dippin' Dots were still delicious, and besides, that's just one more thing that makes Orlando that much more special – plenty of Root Beer Float Dippin' Dots in the store near Disney World, how I miss that place. We couldn't believe how crowded the Toledo mall was on a Wednesday afternoon, and because I hadn't been in one in years, there were all these new gadgets, gizmos, and what-nots that our family had to check out and play around with,

probably making us look like total hicks. But that's ok, we had fun! And not only do I love living in a rural area because we have no crime, crowds, or traffic, but it makes things like visiting malls or big movie theaters rare treats and fun vacations!



4 party animals in the hotel

Probably the most fun I had on this vacation was when we rented a pontoon boat and took it into Lake Erie. Now, don't be fooled by stats – You wouldn't know that Lake Erie is the second smallest of the Great Lakes in surface area when you're out there on a boat – you go out far enough, and you can't see shore, like all of the Great Lakes. When we looked at a map when we got home, we found that we had barely even gotten into the lake, yet it took us about 30 minutes to get there and there was water as far as the eye can see. Setting Lake Erie apart from the others is its relatively shallow depths, at least on the west side of the lake where we were visiting – the water averaged 1-3 feet in depth! It looked really strange to see people *standing* in the lake, really far from shore, with water only up to their knees!

There were some interesting and fun islands to explore; we anchored our boat near the Woodtick Peninsula and waded onto the beach for some sea shell hunting and sand playing.



My kids were well behaved on the boat, and they enjoyed themselves, with the little guy even finding time for his afternoon nap.



(Note the can of precious Coke Zero clutched in his hand. He stole it from his dad, but apparently it didn't help keep him awake!)

We wanted to dock at a cool looking place called Turtle Island, but it didn't seem very kid-friendly – maybe next time if Hubby and I can get back for date night. [Turtle Island](#) (click the link for more history) was once destined to be a great resort island, but plans fell through, and it remains abandoned. There are some abandoned structures that remain on the island, including an old lighthouse and an old-fashioned crane (on the right of the island in this picture).



Since Turtle Island is way out in the lake, you wouldn't expect there to be wildlife, but we saw this fox looking for fish on the beach – so cool to see!! Perhaps because of the shallow nature of this part of Lake Erie, animals can just walk out to the islands, or maybe the fox was a stowaway. Pardon the bumpiness of the video – taking pictures and video was something I struggled with the entire time on the bobbing boat!

There is also a “haunted lighthouse” (in reality it’s called the [Toledo Harbor Light](#)) that looks very cool and emits a ghostly warning horn every few minutes.



As we were floating nearby gaping at it, a Coast Guard boat came speeding up to us, lights flashing and all. What the...? There were four Coast Guard officers on the boat, all armed, and the one in charge informed us that they “had the authority of the US government” and were going to board our boat and search it.

As serious as it seemed, they must have liked what they saw because we were awarded a “good as gold” form, which means that we had been following all the maritime laws and regulations. But it was kind of a strange experience to be all alone floating in the middle of Lake Erie one minute, only to have a boat full of gun-wielding government agents on your case the next... They were nice enough, I suppose, but sheesh, why our boat? Later when we returned to shore, the owner of the boat rental place said that in all their years of renting out their boats, none of their clients had ever undergone a boarding inspection by the Coast Guard. Lucky us. Perhaps with all my kids on board, they were suspicious of some illegal Canadian smuggling, eh?

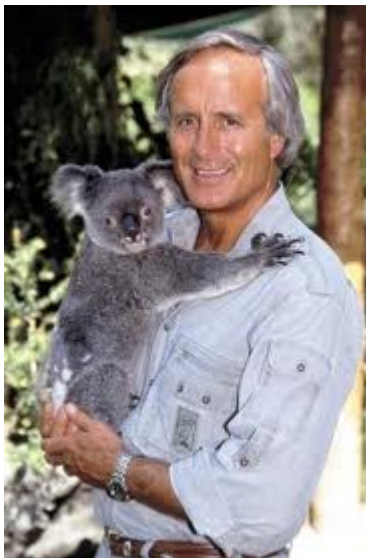
Despite all the high-seas adventure, the vacation was fun and so refreshing to be able to spend time together as a family without distraction, not having to worry about household

chores, responsibilities, or Dad's work for a few days. Just what I needed to get out of my kids-are-fighting-constantly-rut at home, and hey – I even lost track of that back-to-school countdown I had been swearing by before the vacation!

And the best news of all this? Hubby's uncle has been released from the hospital and is now recovering at home. Time will tell us what he will need to make his heart healthier, but for now, he is out of immediate danger and for that, we are so thankful!

Been Waiting Over 7 Years For This!!!

I HAVE TICKETS TO SEE JACK HANNA!!!



I've been waiting MORE than 7 years for this! Mr. Hanna became a personal hero of mine and Hubby's around 1998, and as we were driving down to Florida from Illinois for our honeymoon in 1999, we speculated on how cool it would be to run into Jack Hanna since we were going to Sea World (where he would and still does often appear). And guess

what happened? We ran into Jack Hanna at Sea World!!! We were going down to an underwater viewing area for one of the exhibits (don't even remember which one, don't care), and it was roped off with a sign, "tv show taping in progress". Just as we turned around, they took down the ropes, and so we went in, and there was Jack Hanna! And we were the only fans in there with him! I got tougue-tied, and I forgot every question I wanted to ask him, but luckily, Hubby was able to explain to him what big fans we were. Jack Hanna autographed a special picture for us, even writing our names on it, but I'm sad to say that this honeymoon treasure was one of a few coveted items that was put in a special box and left with so-called trusted friends during a move when it wouldn't fit into our car. Unfortunately, the "friends" never sent the box to us as they promised, and who knows what has happened to our Jack Hanna autograph or other treasures by now?

But that's not the point. I've been hoping to replace it and to see Mr. Hanna do a show, but he never has appearances close to my corner of Ohio. He came to Toledo once 7 years ago, but the ticket prices were kind of steep, especially since we didn't know if our then 2-year-old would enjoy it, plus we had just moved to the state and didn't know any babysitters. I've regretted not going to Jack's Toledo show ever since, especially when he hasn't come close to the area. But about a month ago, I happened to check his website, and Jack was going to be less than 2 hours away from us AS WELL as appearing in the town where my parents live – TWO opportunities to see him! So anyway, long story short, we have tickets to see JACK HANNA in OCTOBER!!! I can't wait! This is going to make it so much easier for me to have to forget about the MLB post-season this year (my team is terrible this year and essentially eliminated themselves opening day).

Before the show, we are scheduled to attend a Jungle Jamboree with Jack Hanna also! Maybe I can find a way to get my honeymoon autographed picture replaced. Hubby actually tried

once to get me one for a birthday, but there was miscommunication, and Jack Hanna signed it to my husband instead of to me. I actually thought that was pretty funny and classic Jack – totally something he would do as Jack tends to use his brain to store animal facts rather than organizational details. I think I'll bring my favorite book, Monkeys on the Interstate for him to autograph also; I just have to sneak backstage with all my things I want him to autograph somehow. And I'll have to read Monkeys on the Interstate again just so I can study up on it and write a list of questions down to ask Jack in case I get the chance again – I WILL NOT get tongue-tied this time!!! I'll have to take a break from reading the Harry Potter series, so now I definitely won't be finished in time to get to see part one of the last Harry Potter movie while it's in the theater – OH WELL! I'm going to see Jack Hanna live on stage!!!



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First day down!

I am going to take a break from Egypt right now and write about my anniversary weekend! So, for the next three days, I will not answer any questions about my other blogs, but keep the questions coming and I'll get back to them!

Today was the first day of our anniversary weekend! We will be married for a year on Sunday! Today we went to the zoo and had time to make it to the mall. We actually didn't but a lot at the zoo besides lunch (including the souvenir cup, with a picture of the baby giraffe on it. Expensive, but it's our weekend!) and gave money to help animals out! Though we did get plenty of pictures and some video (especially of the baby polar bear). We are planning on putting those on youtube and then getting them onto our facebook page! Or, at least I am. I couldn't tell you if Tony is going to or not. But while at the zoo, we found three dead animals! Ugh!!! ☹ Though shortly after the first one, everyone was kicked out of the reptile house, so I think they were taking care of that one. The other two were in the amphibians exhibit and the aquarium. And then, we went into the Rain Forest exhibit to hunt for the sloth only to find out that the sloth died in January! She was 27 years old and that is long lived for a sloth, but still, I always loved searching for her!

At the mall, we looked through plenty of stores without buying anything! And then we stopped by the bookstore and Godiva! I bought a huge over 500 page Egypt book! It talks about the treasure of the Great Pharaohs, Tutankhamen and Rameses II. I got it for a great price too! Tony bought a film making book,

which I hope helps him out.

Oh, I forgot we also went to Goodwill this morning and bought a book about the Lost Tomb. It's about KV5, the tomb of many of Rameses II's sons.

With the pictures from the zoo, I plan on making a scrapbook to remind us of our first anniversary together, since we still haven't figured out what to get as a reminder of our very first year as a married couple. I thought a scrapbook would be nice at least. Well, I think it's time to head to bed. We're busy tomorrow also!

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!!