

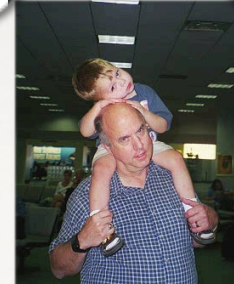
# *Our Florida Trip*



*(One Uncle's Perspective)*

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2001**

Jane and I made our way to the airport early Saturday morning. We spent most of Friday night packing and I don't think it was until then we really got the idea we were going. Packing took us until well into the evening and we were up early in order to be at the airport the required minimum two hours prior to our flight. We even got a cab because LAX isn't allowing any private vehicles into the airport proper. So there we were, 8:30am climbing into a yellow cab with several heavy bags (we'd decided to try and consolidate our carry-on into one, very heavy back pack which I got to wear). It was very creepy driving into an airport where there were no sky caps, no lines of cars, and no one kissing loved ones good bye.



The airport itself went smoothly and we were ready to go in short order. The flight across the country was uneventful (including the showing of Dr. Dolittle 2) and we landed about a half hour early.

The Orlando Airport is a weird place in and of itself. There is a hotel (Marriott) within the



terminal and before you get anywhere near your luggage you are bombarded by gift shops for all the major theme parks. Like Vegas and slot machines, you can't turn your 1.5 without running into Mickey Mouse or Shamu. Thankfully, Jane pulled me away, reminding me of our impending corporate overload and advising me not to peak too early.

We got our luggage (another funny thing about the Orlando Airport: no luggage carts, not even in the racks where you have to pay two dollars) so we grabbed our heavy bags (I'll explain later how poorly we packed) and headed in search of the rest of the family. We made our way back to the center of the airport (across from the fiberglass killer whale) where we heard Faye pointing out "Uncle Jag and Auntie Jane" to Bailey. We saw them and were greeted by a running child with a huge grin on his face. A nicer site couldn't be imagined. We followed Faye and Bailey (more Bailey, even though we had to keep correcting his course - if we had followed him, we would have ended up somewhere in Iceland) and met up with Mom & Dad and the beautiful Rya. Dad was spending these first, precious moments of his



*vacation dealing with the car rental place and making sure we got the 15 passenger van we needed, Mom was hanging out trying to relax while watching dad from a distance dealing with the car rental people, and Rya was doing what would become a habit over the next seven days, crawling all over creation like mercury from a broken thermometer.*

*We got our multi-passenger van and were met with our first setback of the night when Dad discovered the back seat was not moveable. This meant we had to load bags under and over seats. Not an easy thing. We finally made it to our hotel (at least the one for the first night) and, after a bite in the bar by the pool, headed for our uncomfortable sleeping arrangements. This hotel was only one bedroom with a pullout bed in the living room (which Jane and I got). Faye and Bailey slept on the floor with Mom, Dad and Rya in the bedroom.*



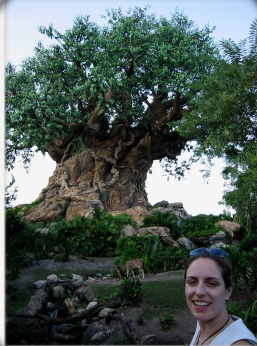
## DAY 1 - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2001



Sunday morning, bright and early, we all headed out for Disney's Animal Kingdom. We all loaded into the van and, after much complaining about the price of parking, followed the blue line to the handicapped parking area. Then, after more complaining about how far we had to walk as opposed to those who took the shuttle, we found ourselves in line and buying our four day park hopper passports (these allowed us to shuttle from park to park if we wanted to) and made our way through the gates into the first part of our adventure.

The first thing to happen as we walked through the gates was something which would come to be a mark of our trip - getting in line to have pictures taken with, and autographs signed by, the characters. Our first one was Turk, the monkey friend from the recent Disney-fied version of Tarzan. While we got in line with Bailey and Rya, Faye went off to buy autograph books for the kids. It didn't take long for Bailey to get the idea of both waiting in line and having a costume clad





castmember sign his book. Of course, Faye's concept of the project was to make sure we had pictures of the kids with everyone who signed their book. Therefore, I was put on camera duty. Not a bad duty considering I had borrowed my friend Pete's Digital Elph and was more than happy to play. Jane, meanwhile, had hold of the digital video camera and was happily shooting away.

Making it past Turk and actually into the park we headed towards the Animal Kingdom's centerpiece, the Tree of Life.

An amazing piece of scenery, the fake plastic tree (thanks Radiohead) contains sculptures of over 150 animals (it may be more than 300, I get confused) and is the size of the spaceship Earth ride at EPCOT. Unfortunately, you can't get to it. We did get some nice pictures of it, however.

Of course, we now had choices to make. Since the Animal Kingdom is designed (like all Disney parks) in different "worlds" (in this case, countries) we had to decide where we wanted to visit first. Being early morning (and since no one had eaten breakfast) we opted for the "Safari" ride through the wilds of





Africa. Our guide was a native of Kenya who started our tour by teaching the entire truck how to say good morning in Kenyan (I know that's not the name of the language, but sue me, I don't remember what it's actually called or even what the word he taught us was). The tour itself was fun, driving past animals who were free to roam wherever they wanted (within reason). We even got held up at one point by a herd of Thompson's Gazelles ("Tommys") who refused to clear a path. The cheese factor included a run in with poachers (we kept getting updates as to their whereabouts and finally had to divert our course to help the officials). The redeeming quality there, though, was the live actor who got to stand outside in the Florida heat with a machine gun pointed inside a truck filled with mannequins and thanked us in the truck for our "help." Bailey was great, except he really didn't catch the concept until about 10 minutes in. Before then, he was just nodding and saying he saw things, but he didn't realize they were far away and he actually had to look for them. Once he did, his excitement level shot up 110%.

The bus ride ended and, after a brief lunch, we decided to go on a nature walk. This was nice in that we saw all sorts of bugs, gorillas and hippos. All very zoo like. Nice, Disney style zoos, but zoo like nonetheless.



We then headed to "India" for a water ride, which guarantees wetness and a close-up look at Tigers. Of course, the fun thing about going with small children to a park with rides is that they can't really ride any of them. This was the case with the raft ride and so we ended up having to take turns riding and waiting with Bailey and Rya. Dad and I had to go on it twice just to make sure everyone had company. Ironically, even though I went on it twice, I didn't get nearly as wet as Jane who only went on it once. She got so wet that she had to take off her trousers and make an impromptu skirt out of Dad's shirt. It was very cute and received compliments from family and strangers alike (okay, maybe not compliments exactly, but certainly a few wanton stares). It was here, on our second nature walk, that we saw fighting fruit bats and fairly active tigers.





*Leaving the live animals for a brief time, we headed over to the theatre space in "Camp MinnieMickey" to catch*



*the Lion King spectacular. I must say it was pretty good.*

*Combining elements from the Broadway show, acrobatics and guys in suits, it didn't really capture the story of the film so much as celebrate the "Hakuna Matata" life style*



*(which, by the way, was a pervasive theme the whole day). Near the end of the show, one of the lead dancers grabbed Bailey*

*(along with others grabbing other kids) stuck a noisemaker in his hand and led him on a parade around the theatre.*

*Needless to say he was very excited and performed very well!*



*But that excitement was nothing compared to what followed: Just outside of the exit was the character trail where Mickey, Minnie, Goofy and*





*Daisy Duck, all in safari type garb, waited for young fans to maul them with love. And Bailey was no exception.*

*Faithfully clutching his autograph book, he patiently stood in line until it was his turn and then excitedly thrust his book and pen into their gloved hands. Once the signing was complete, then came the posing, which involved Uncle Jag, Auntie Jane, Pa, and Mommy all trying to capture the moment. We all did a pretty admirable job if I do say so*

*myself. Of course, now you're wondering: What about Rya, where was she during all this? Well, since she had an autograph book of her own, she was being held by Mommy or Auntie Jane (even Bubby sometimes) and was being thrust into the mix as well, making sure there was a photographic record of her with all the same characters as her brother.*

*Now, as the day was winding down (the park closed at 5pm) we headed over to "Dinosaur Land" (not the most original name, but what the hell) so Bailey and Rya could see the dinosaurs. Jane and I stuck with the rest of the family through one sitting on a plastic dino and then we headed off for the action thrill ride "Dinosaur." An Indiana Jones type ride (with a computerized motion simulator car on a moving track)*





the storyline of this weak entry in the category involved a time machine and a plot to capture an allosaurus just before a meteor crashed and destroyed the dinosaurs altogether. Like I said, weak. We spent way too much time in the dark and not enough time being scared or excited.

Then we rejoined the rest of the gang and after a bit of time in the Animal Kingdom giftshop (the purchases were starting already) decided to head over to EPCOT for dinner (thanks to our park hopper passes).

At EPCOT, it was decision time. We needed to find a place to eat we could all agree on. After debating back and forth, we decided on the restaurant at the Chinese pavilion. Before deciding though, Faye, Rya, Jane and I made a stop at guest relations (Mom, Dad and Bailey were riding Spaceship Earth). The absolutely wonderful man at Guest



relations helped us pick our dinner spot, made reservations for us at both the Coral Reef restaurant and the character breakfast and then gave both Rya and Bailey (he'd rejoined us by this point) a stuffed toy just so they could have something to play with. He was great and a wonderful representative of Disney.

On the way to the Chinese Pavilion we met the only guy in the world to have authorized Disney tattoos



([Disneytattoooguy.com](http://Disneytattoooguy.com)). A mild oddity, but we got pictures with him anyway. Then, finally, we made it to the restaurant.



The food was good, punctuated by one slight drama when Bailey slid between his booster seat and the table. His plaintive cries of "help, help, help" immediately brought us all to his aid. He wasn't hurt, just bemused as to what happened (don't think he was expecting the table to be as deep as it was). While the rest of the family finished eating, Bailey and I went outside to watch the parade go by. When everyone else joined us, we all headed around the big lagoon and watched the wonderful fireworks display before heading back to our new hotel for the night.



This hotel was more a resort complex than a traditional hotel. It boasted 96 holes of golf (granted, 36 of those were miniature, but still...), a clubhouse and a lake with watersports. Our three bedroom, three bath "house" was a full two miles from the front entrance, just about as far away as you could get and still be within the resort borders. During our stay there we got lost several times just trying to get to and from the highway.

## DAY 2 – MONDAY. OCTOBER 1, 2001



*Like the Animal Kingdom, we didn't even get in the door at Disney/MGM before we were standing in line for pictures and autographs with the characters. In fact, we didn't know it at the time, but this was going to be a character heavy day. We started with Captain Hook and the characters from Pinocchio. Finally, we made it into the park and decided to hit the Indiana*



*Jones Stunt Spectacular first. It's an amazing stunt show where they basically recreate all the biggest events from "Raiders of the Lost Ark," from the rolling boulder to the Arabic village to the blowing up of the flying wing. It*



*was really impressive...If you're older than 2 and a half. If you happen to be two and a half, well, then, watching little far away people is about as exciting as, well, watching little people who are far away. In other words, not very. Bailey was quite bored, but perked up a little after the show when we put him "behind enemy lines" and he got to stand next to a tank.*

From there it was on to the Muppets in 3D show (there are a lot of shows at Disney/MGM). This one was pretty cool, too, as it involved the Muppets. Aside from that, though, the plot, which was about a computer generated 3D character and an escaped little bunny, was kind of weak. We did get a picture of Jane and Bailey with a 10 foot tall Kermit, though.



The Muppets were followed by...you guessed it, another show. This one was The Little Mermaid and by now Bailey was very excited. See, all he wanted to see was Ariel (and Sebastian and Flounder) and Genie. Genie we weren't sure we could accommodate, but Ariel, no problem! So off we went to the show, which was for little kids and sure enough, our little kids loved it. Bailey was enraptured by seeing his favorite (at least that day) characters on the stage in front of him. By the time we got out from "Under the Sea" I think all us adults were getting a bit bored of shows so we did what anyone would have done in the same situation...went to another show.



This time it was the premiere of "Disney Playhouse Live" featuring Bear in the Big Blue house with all of his friends, Rolie Polie Olie, Pooh story time and Stanley (he has a fish



and big book of everything). Again, this excited Bailey to no end. He danced, collected confetti and sang along at all the appropriate times.

A break was needed now and an appropriate one was found in front of this Big "Sorcerer's Apprentice" hat they had set up in the middle of the park to celebrate "100 Years of Magic" (This would have been Uncle Walt's 100th b-day). There were a bunch of characters

all lined up and ready for swarms of adoring fans. We fit the bill completely! Everyone got into the act, not just Bailey, as we collected pictures and autographs from Alice, the Mad Hatter, the White Rabbit, Cruella DeVil, Eeyore, the two people from Atlantis (Milo and Kira), and others. Lots of fun, lots of pages in the autograph book filled in, and part of our mission accomplished.





*Now, though, it was time for a ride. The ride we chose was The Great Movie Ride. See Disney/MGM is designed like a big film studio/Hollywood type place. The centerpiece of this extravaganza is the Chinese Theatre, which houses said Great Movie Ride.*



*The ride encompasses the history of film with animatronics, live actors and nice set pieces (the Alien one and Casablanca come to mind). Naturally, we didn't make it on the ride first time we tried. Nope. See, just as we were getting into line, who should wander past but Genie. Genie hadn't been out there before and Bailey HAD been waiting all day to see him, so off we went, with Bailey on my shoulders, to get photo and signature from the big blue guy. Good thing we did, too, because right behind him were Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee (who, for some reason, Bailey showed more interest in than Genie, but what are you gonna do?)*

*After we finally made it on The Great Movie Ride (which the kids pretty much slept through), it was almost time for the brand spankin' new parade. We didn't know what to expect (and since we had a few minutes before it started anyway, we left Bubby with the kids and Jane, Faye, Dad and I decided it was time for more adult fare. Since*



there were only two "adult" rides in the park we hit the one we'd all heard of first: The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror. Jane was a bit nervous (as were we all) about the ride, but since she had been hearing about it for almost 6 years, she knew she had to at least try. The general concept is this: You enter a hotel, done up to look like a classic Hollywood hotel from the 30s/40s (most likely based on The Roosevelt, home of the first Academy Awards). You hear a ghost story (narrated by Rod Serling in a wonderful bit of trickery) about how, during an electrical storm, a group of people riding in an elevator vanished. Well...you go through the bowels of the hotel into a dilapidated elevator your self and then you start to rise. Once you hit the top floor, the doors open and your elevator car moves out amongst a star filled, Twilight Zone inspired set until, finally, it comes to a stop. Then...

*It Drops.*

*Quickly.*

As the car drops, doors open and you catch glimpses of the outside world as it flies past you, going first up, then down as you bounce over and over again. When you're in total darkness, you can't tell if you're moving up or down yourself, so the only point of reference you have are those



fleeting images of the bright afternoon Florida sun. By the time we came to a stop, Jane was giggling like a schoolgirl. As the lights came on, she screamed, "I did it. I did it. That was fun." And the entire elevator car broke into applause for her. It was great. I, of course, was terrified.

Leaving the ride, we naturally bought the digital picture they snapped of us on the ride (this new, ubiquitous money grubbing device became both a source of preserving our memories with shots we couldn't get otherwise and a cause for arguments and pointed comments on the high profit margins) and headed back to watch the parade.

The parade itself was fairly lame if you're an adult. It felt like a small town gathering with all the characters riding along the proscribed route in custom built Chevy cars. Don't get me wrong; the cars were pretty amazing (and I would have loved the opportunity to examine them closer) but just watching people in costumes waving as they drove past? Not so much fun. Bailey, on the other hand, was in rapturous awe.



Now it was time for the Beauty and the Beast show. This one was nice since it



mimicked the plot of the movie and gave everyone a chance to rest. We needed it before heading off to the Rock'n Roller Coaster, featuring Aerosmith. Again, Bubby was left with the kids and the four adventurous ones went off to ride. Here we were going to get onto a stretch Limo (our coaster car) and head off to catch an Aerosmith gig. Like Space Mountain, it was inside in the dark, with icons of Hollywood created in day-glo fluorescent paint. We got all the way to the front of the line and Jane chickened out. She just didn't want to go upside down. Ultimately, we talked her into it and we boarded our "limo." It started off slowly and then shot forward, propelling us into the blackness. About 45 seconds into the 2:30 ride, Jane was screaming in excitement, loving every bit of it. We got off and she was exhilarated. But now it was time for a food.

On the way to the restaurant, Bailey decided he wanted to be a bat, so we walked a portion of the way with his legs draped over my shoulders and his heads hanging down my back. This was easier than carrying him along by his ankles (which was the other alternative).

We had dinner and then went to get seats for Fantasmic. This is a fireworks/live action/filmed/multi media extravaganza with Mickey Mouse battling the evil demons of nightmares trying to take over his good dreams. They have a larger, better version of it at Disneyland but this one was fun. Towards the end of the show, there is a final "battle royal" between Mickey and Maleficent, who has transformed herself into a big

Dragon. Again, Bailey was enthralled watching this. He became absolute fascinated with the Dragon.

After the show, we headed back to the hotel to try and get an early night. We had a big day coming up.

### DAY 3 – TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2001

*There isn't a lot to tell about day 3 since we pretty much spent it doing one thing...swimming.*



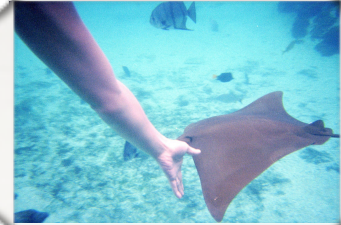
*We got up and headed out to Discovery Cove, which is a side park across the street from, and owned by, Sea World. We purchased the basic package (and not the upgradeable dolphin swim) online weeks earlier and Jane and I were especially looking forward to this day most of all. Why? Because all you did all day was swim in a man-made tropical reef with fish and rays. For those of you who know Jane, swimming with rays rates up somewhere between seeing a Madonna concert from*

*the first row of the stadium and making out with John Cusack in the back row of a theatre. And since neither of these are likely to happen, you can imagine how excited she was.*

*We got to the park and checked in, where we all (including Bailey and Rya) received personalized ID badges with our pictures. These would serve, literally, as our meal ticket in the park. See, our purchase price*



included lunch as well as 7 days worth of admission to Sea World. We could also use our ID cards to make purchases. This way we didn't have to carry anything with us, it could all be put into lockers (also provided). With ID cards around our necks, we went for our orientation, which mainly consisted of a guide pointing out where everything was and telling us to have a good time. We then headed over to get our life vests, masks and snorkels (again, all included, and we got to keep the snorkels as a special parting gift). All kitted out (and with our day clothes in a locker or two) we staked out a couple of lounge chairs and headed into the water.



Now for me, this wasn't as easy as it sounds, since I'm just a little afraid of it, but soon enough I was swimming with the fishies. Bailey, too, was having fun. He didn't quite get the hang of using the mask, but he loved playing in the water. They even had a "lazy river" type thing which encircled the fish lagoon and went under waterfalls and into the aviary. This was the area where Bailey really excelled. He loved going under the falls and playing with the "silver spaghetti," which were flotation aides.





*In addition to the main lagoon, there was also a baby ray tank (no other fish besides the rays) and then there was the Dolphin area, away from the rest of it. We walked over there once, towards the end of the day, to see the dolphins. Not that impressed.*

*In the lagoon, though, they did something really cool. They put sharks, groupers and barracudas in with you. Sort of. In reality, you were separated from the predators by a sheet of Plexiglas, but you couldn't tell that right off. So while you're swimming around, just minding your own business, all of a sudden there's a 5-foot grouper staring right at you. Pretty awesome, if you ask me.*



*In the aviary, they gave you food to feed the various types of birds, and at one point I went in with Bailey on my shoulders. We tried to feed a duck-type creature which honked at us while charging and nipping at our ankles. Needless to say, it freaked both of us out a little bit and it took a while before Bailey was comfortable feeding the rest of the birds. (for the rest of the trip, the "grumpy duck" was a common refrain).*

*Before we left, Jane and I spent some quality time swimming and petting the rays. All in all, a perfect day.*



*That night, however, the lack of sleep we'd all been (not) getting finally caught up to us. We went to Downtown Disney, a shopping area with restaurants and the largest Disney Store ever. You may ask why did we go here if we were spending days on end at the park? Because Faye had a discount card for 10% off, which didn't apply at the parks but did here. So in we went.*

*Arguments and disagreements started almost immediately after we pulled into the parking lot. There was a restaurant called "Fulton's" which I thought it would be fun to go to (since that is Faye's last name). Turns out it was really expensive and had a long wait. Then there was the thought of going to Captain Jack's. Same problem. Everyone started to get a bit testy about where to go and how much we should spend and when we were going to eat and it all just became a huge nightmare. It didn't get any better when we actually went shopping and everyone wanted to go their own way. After we all sort of worked things out, we left, but not before buying Bailey a huge stuffed*



Dragon (like the one he'd seen the night before) and deciding to go somewhere else for dinner. We ended up at a place called Pebbles (we were trying to get someplace near a pirate themed miniature golf place, which we ended up going to a different night). The service there was terrible, with a long wait and by the end, we were all friends again. We'd found a new place to vent our frustrations.

So off we went home again, preparing for another day at a Disney Park...and an early morning breakfast.

On the way home, though, something amazing happened. As we were driving the several miles back to the room (two of which were taken up with the ride to our door from the front gate) Bailey decided to talk to his new dragon. And then I decided to answer him, as Dragon. There was a moment of silence as everyone wondered what Bailey would say. He turned around in his car seat to look at his mom and started with wide-eyed disbelief as he spoke "He talks!" Well that was it. The daily and nightly conversations between Bailey and Dragon had started. Dragon quickly became a confidant, hearing stories about the days adventures and being privy to top-secret ideas "I got a plan" Bailey would say. We immediately saw a problem, though. How could Dragon talk if I wasn't there? We decided Dragon was magical and could only talk in the car. This was fine for the time being and everyone was happy. Several days later, it would be an entirely different story.



#### DAY 4 – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2001

Today started out early. Not that any of the other days were late, necessarily, just this day was earlier than most. Why? Well we had made reservations earlier in the week (see "Day 1") for a character breakfast and here we were. The only problem was that it was at the Contemporary Hotel (it's the A-Frame place the Monorail goes through on it's way to the Magic Kingdom, which is the place like Disneyland - Disney World is the

name of the whole area) and we were hoping to spend the day at EPCOT, a little further away. So we were going to have to double back and re-park, getting the kids in and out of the van one more time. Add to that the fact that breakfast was at 7:30am





*and, well, you can see the dilemma.*

*So anyway, there we were, all piled in and heading to the hotel (Bailey had Dragon faithfully at this side) at ten past the hour. We barely made it. I ran ahead and*

*checked us in and by the time everyone else arrived, we were ready to be seated...but not before having our picture taken in front of a great big breakfast plate. Over looking the plate was Goofy, dressed as a chef. Was it worth getting up this early, you bet!*



*Of course, being us, nothing ever goes completely right the first time, so when we were seated away from what we thought was the main action, we complained to get a better table. Bailey helped matter along by falling down the stairs (not the last time he would do this on this day) and they moved us to a table more in the thick of things. What does that mean in a character breakfast? Well it means you get placed right in the path of not only Goofy, but Minnie, Mickey, Chip, Dale and Pluto as well. So in between eating powdered eggs, Mickey shaped waffles (I think they were there), mini pancakes and whatever else they had, we got pictures with and autographs from some*

of the most beloved characters. They would even stop and dance from time to time. However, since this was also a birthday trip for three of our seven participants, we couldn't let that go unnoticed. So we mentioned it to our hostess, who dutifully brought out three cupcakes and cards with birthday greetings from the whole gang. Our day was getting off to a grand start!

From breakfast, we headed over to Epcot. Naturally, Faye forgot her ticket. Knowing, as we did, that you didn't need your ticket, just the receipt to get in, we didn't worry about this much. We had bought Faye's pass and Jane made sure to have the receipt with us, so we were good to go, right? Wrong. See, in all the excitement of that first day at Animal Kingdom, we had all traded tickets around so we could have the picture of our favorite character on our own ticket. After an up close and personal look at how their computer system works, we discovered the ticket Faye left behind was



purchased by Dad, who followed instructions to not keep the receipt with the ticket itself. So off Dad and I went, back to the hotel to get the correct receipt. On the way, we decided to stop back at the place where we had purchased Dragon (who, it seemed, had developed a tear along the seam and so needed to be replaced without Bailey knowing). Once back at the park, we met up with our crew and decided to hit a ride. Our first





choice was the Energy Pavilion. This long, boring ride was a welcome relief after the morning's excitement, and most of us slept through Ellen DeGeneres and Bill Nye, The Science Guy explaining how dinosaurs were responsible for energy...sort of.

Then we thought about hitting a new ride called "Test Track." Mom and Dad went first and we all stayed with the kids. By this time, Bailey had discovered a play area with jumping jets of water and before you

could say "not with your socks on" he was running through it, screaming and laughing. Okay, there was a little more screaming than we were ready for. It seemed that every time the water would come up from a certain spot, Bailey would scream a high-pitched wail. When questioned if he was okay, his response was "first the water goes here and then I go 'eeeeeeee'." So there you have it. Nothing wrong at all. When Mom and Dad came back, they watched the kids and the rest of us went on the ride. It was fun, except Jane and Faye began noticing that whenever they were on a ride together, it would stop at some point in the middle. This theory proved true on several occasions (more often than not, so we figure someone had it out for them).



*From there it was on to the World Showcase, the area of Epcot where various countries from around the world ship their young people over to explain to Americans why it's better for them to see all the wonders of their native land without ever getting a passport. The general theme was "Yankee, stay home." Except in Canada.*

*I could elaborate, tell you about the drum parade in Japan, the comedy show in France, Bailey refusing to look at Aladdin in Morocco (which, by the way, still sold these wonderful camel leather hats like the one I bought when I was there ten years ago) or me dancing with a red dressed costumed beauty in Italy. I could but let's face it, the kids weren't into country hopping, it was hot, and Jane kept wondering why you would want to look at these things instead of going to the real places. The best time here was when Jane and I snuck off for a little bit by ourselves and found a little hideaway next to the central lagoon that was very peaceful.*





Coming back around the just in time for the middle of the park. double decker bus pulls characters on it (Mickey and Pluto, Tigger and Dale, Genie and and stood around for autographs. Bailey made it doesn't matter that some of these were doubles or triples - they were wearing different costumes, or at least Bailey was). It was also a lot of fun for us grown-ups. While I was taking a picture of Bailey with Goofy, I got down on the ground to



countries, we made it Character bus in the This was great! A up, with eleven and Minnie and Goofy Eyecore and Piglet, Chip Baloo) who all got out pictures and out like a bandit (and no,

get an up angle, and what does Goofy do? He gets right down there with me. Tigger and Bailey even bounced for a bit. But the absolute best was Baloo (he who had been appointed Jane's favorite). When Jane went up to get her picture taken with him, he first tried to make off with her and then, after she insisted on staying, she convinced him to the "back scratch." If you don't know it, go see "the Jungle Book." Jane was so excited she made me rewind the video to show everyone afterwards.



From there, we hit the Living Seas pavilion before going for dinner at the Coral Reef. The Coral Reef is a great restaurant which shares a wall with the Living Seas so you get a dinner show with your meal. We were very excited since this was going to be the big birthday dinner for the three birthday kids. Dad even made a big deal about it, insisting he, Faye and Jane all ordered lobster. (of course, Jane and I got around this by each ordering something and then splitting).

The meal was excellent, and, after a rocky start, so was the service. And then came Bailey's second fall of the day - he was climbing around the banquet while all the girls were away and then he came crashing down. At first we didn't realize how bad it was (or wasn't as the case may be) since when he landed he hit a plate, which then proceeded to clatter against the table. It made a godawful racket, drawing the attention

of everyone in the room (except his mother, who was too far away and occupied by changing his little sister). He was fine, ultimately, but it did give us quite a scare.

Our last stop of the evening (well, Jane and I did make another run through the Living Seas, going in the back way) was at the Imagination Pavilion. Faye was really excited about this one because this is where Figment (her favorite character, no to mention her first tattoo) is from. Unfortunately, Figment was no longer part of the ride (He is being brought back, though). The ride itself was kind of lame, but with a couple of really nifty visual effects. At the end, though, the gift shop was chock-a-block full of Figment merchandise. Faye was once again happy. Mom and Dad even bought her a very cool Figment print for her birthday.

And then, finally, it was time to go home.



## DAY 5 – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2001

*The morning of Day Five started out a little differently than the others. See, the place we were staying was a time-share, so Mom had signed us all up to go listen to their presentation (and get \$40 in cash at the end of it).*

*See, she was told things about how this would work and the people lied...so we weren't very happy.*

*We ate a few donuts and then headed back to our room to phone our complaints into the sales association and gather Jane (she had bribed me into letting her sleep a little late that day) before going off to our last day at Disney World.*

*Magic Kingdom here we come.*

*We had promised Bailey a train ride the before, when he had seen the monorail going through the hotel at our character breakfast, so the monorail is what we took to get across the big lagoon to the park itself. Our first stop (well, after seeing a bunch of characters dancing in front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle that is) was*







Adventureland. I, of course, wanted to go to Pirates of the Caribbean but we were waylaid by Aladdin's Magic Carpet ride on the way. No problem. It was a fun ride, like Dumbo, but with pitch controls as well as altitude. Bailey loved it. From there we made it to Pirates and taught Bailey the "Yo Ho" song (which he really got into by the end of the day).

Lots of rides followed. You'll forgive me if I don't recall their exact order or which ones, precisely, we hit, but I'll give you the highlights. Since Mr. Toad's Wild Ride had been taken out (discontinued even) Fantasyland wasn't the greatest experience, but it was still

fun. Everyone (particularly Dad) spent a great deal of time and energy explaining to everyone else who would listen how this was different than the one in California (personally, I can't wait to go to Euro Disney just to write about how different that one is from both of these). Bailey really liked Peter Pan and the longest wait we had was for Pooh. Dumbo was also a big hit since Bailey went on it twice. The Tea Cups, though, were a different story.

The first time around, Bailey fell asleep on Auntie Janie's





shoulder and slept right the way through the line. When they got into the cup itself, Pa and Auntie Janie expected him to wake up. No such luck. He slept through the whole of the ride and kept right on sleeping while we all went on Space Mountain (in shifts). When he finally woke up, he explained he had missed something, but couldn't put his finger on what it was.

Then it hit him. The Tea Party! We tried to explain he had gone on it but slept but he was having none of that rubbish. So we had to go on it again. This time, I went on it as well. Normally I get sick on this kind of ride, but I figured with Bailey in control, I'd be fine.

Wrong.

Bailey sat down and immediately began spinning (even before the cup was released, he was trying to turn it). Now, no one had ever explained how this contraption worked to the young boy, but there he was, all 2 years and eight months of him, straining for all he was worth to make that tea cup spin. Once the ride actually started, he kept trying to do it faster and faster. He's going to be a test pilot someday if he keeps this up.

Food and more rides permeated the rest of the day at the park. At one point Faye, Jane and I took off and hit Splash Mountain (Jane's favorite ride) where we all got wet and

Jane got soaked. We then rushed to meet up with the folks and kids for a last minute ride on the Jungle Cruise. Of course, I wanted to go on Pirates once more before the park closed, so as we climbed aboard our Jungle boat I commented on wanting to hit the other ride. Our guide took that information and ran with it, making fun of me, our party and even singing "Yo Ho" for me in case we didn't make it. But we did. We got to close out our riding day with another trip through rogue infested waters. When we got off the ride, Bailey kept up the magic by continuing to sing "Yo Ho" (naturally, his rendition ended with a very proud "I did it.") and he refused to sing "It's a Small World" when Pa asked him to, so I figured a special prize was in order.



So it was time to head on out, stopping only briefly to meet more characters and take a quick trip under Sleeping Beauty's Castle (we knew she was home because the lights were on - so speaketh the wisdom of Bailey Stone). We separated once we hit Main St so we could all go shopping. I headed for the haberdashery because I had inscribed mouse ears to purchase (what would a first trip to the magic kingdom be without a pair of mouse ears with your name written in gold script across the back?). I got Rya and Bailey each a pair and then I decided to get Bailey that extra prize I mentioned earlier. I got him a three cornered pirate hat with the words Pirate Bailey written

across the front. I was very excited when I gave it to him. This excitement was diminished slightly when he declared "I don't wanna be a pirate" and threw the hat on the ground. I'm telling ya, this whole Uncle thing is hard on the psyche.

Leaving the park, Dragon got an earful as he heard all about the day. We dropped Faye and the kids back at the house and then me, Jane, Mom and Dad all headed out to play mini golf. See Jane has never played mini golf and there was a really cool place with a Pirate theme that we'd passed everyday on the freeway. It was a good game, and Jane didn't do too badly, although Dad won. Since we hadn't eaten dinner that night we decided to try and grab a bite on our way home after golf, which proved to be a bit of a task in itself. After trying to eat at several different places (all of which were closed) we settled for a smelly IHOP and didn't get back to the house until late. And of course, we had an early morning coming up.





#### DAY 4 – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2001

Friday started out with a quick stop at the front desk/clubhouse to get our \$40 from the previous day and then we were off. Of course, what were we going to do, especially since we'd already done all the Disney parks? Well, Jane had said she wanted to get a glimpse at the "real" Florida so off we went in search of what Florida is famous for: Gators.

*And we found 'em.*

Welcome to Gatorland, home of several hundred alligators and crocodiles, not to mention the world famous Gatorland Jumparoo! We paid our entrance fee and headed inside the park, which mostly consisted of rickety wooden walkways built over reclaimed swamp infested with a lot of seemingly docile gators.

Our first stop was a 12 foot plastic gator sitting in the walkway. A perfect picture opportunity for any small child willing to dare its gaping maw. It took Bailey a few minutes to become that daring child, let me tell you.





Eventually, though, he really got into it, sitting on the plastic gator's back and even resting comfortable in its wide open jaws. At times he even held his little sister while she sat on its back.

But then it was off to the Jumparoo. The Jumparoo is just what it sounds like. A guy goes out to a little stand which is in the middle of the swamp and dangles pieces of chicken out over the water until the frisky critters decide to jump for it.

It is an awesome sight to see a 10 foot amphibian leap out of the water, its jaws clamping around the pink flesh before sinking slowly back under the waves. In addition to seeing this, we also got a little bit of an education as the guy with chicken told us about the various animals we were seeing (it turns out they actually can learn their names, who knew?)



After the Jumparoo (can you tell I just like typing that?) we went to check out the crocodile show. We learned (among other things) that aside from





a superficial physical similarity, alligators and crocodiles are about as genetically related as cats and dogs. In other words, you're not going to get an Allodile or Crocigator mix anytime soon. We also found out that the shows rotate amongst the four species of Crocodile since they can't feed the animals more than twice a week. So today we were treated to the crocodiles in the second pen (I don't remember specifically which bred these were, but I don't think they were the Nile variety, they were in the third or fourth pen). This was also where we met Tony.



Tony was the marine biologist hottie (ask Faye, Jane or Mom, hell, even Rya probably thought he was cute) who led the croc show. He answered all our questions (I think most of them were asked just to get closer to him). When we were done there, we walked around the back area of the park before hitting the train station for a little ride.



At the station we met Mike, the entertainment director for the park. He is the guy you see on the postcards (well, used to see, by the time you read this, Tony will probably have

replaced him). We decided he had the perfect little kid job. Think about it, if you're a little kid and you could pick any thing in the world to do, I bet someplace in the top five would be drive a train and wrestle alligators. Welcome to Mike's life. For a guy who just stumbled into a job, he sure lucked out. The only thing preventing me from heading down to Florida and trying to do that is ... well...it is kind of silly to put your head in an alligator's mouth, isn't it?



Of course, this brings us back (once again) to Tony and the alligator wrestling show. This really is something you have to see to believe (odds are, if you watch the travel or discovery channels enough, you will). Basically, there's a ten foot square area covered with sand surrounded by a relatively narrow moat. You reach this sandy area by a short drawbridge over one corner. When we got there and took our seats in the stands, it wasn't long before Tony strutted out onto the sand, looked into the moat (where about a dozen gators were nestled peacefully) and grabbed the lucky wrestling opponent for the day. This little guy measured about six feet long and Tony thought





nothing of grabbing him by the tail and hailing him up onto the sand. What followed was an amazing combination of bravery and stupidity as Tony proceeded to pull the gator's mouth open, keep it shut using two fingers and balance the beast's wide open mouth on his chin.

And then it was our turn. That's right, for a mere \$10, you, too could sit on the back of a very live alligator (whose very sharp teeth were very taped up). Naturally, we did. Faye and Bailey

went first (Bailey was an old pro by this point, remember the plastic one from the beginning of the day? Well he didn't quite get the difference until he was out there and sitting on the scaly back) followed by Jane and I. The money went to the care and feeding of the lovely critters. Now, if you wanted a photograph of yourself on sitting on the back of a very live alligator, well that was going to cost you extra. Sure, you could take a picture yourself, but the professional who got to stand on the sand and block any decent view might not like that. So what did we do? You guessed it, we went and bought the pictures. Not only did we buy the





*pictures, but we had them put on a T-shirt (Jane and I on the back with Faye and Bailey on the front) which we presented to Dad to wear.*

*Then, after a snack bar stop (gator nuggets) and a gift shop stop (post cards and tacky snow globes) we were off to our next adventure...Islands of Adventure to be precise.*

*See the way things work in Orlando, at least since the early 70s, is everyone is involved in the theme park business. So after the four plus Disney parks (there's also Downtown Disney, three water parks and numerous restaurants and hotels - which only take up about 1/4 of the Disney owned land) all the other major park builders moved in. And not just one park. The bigger they are, the more parks they have. As mentioned there's Sea World and its ancillary Discovery Cove. And then there's Universal Studios. Universal added on to its holdings with Citywalk, mimicking its LA counterpart, as well as various resorts like the Hard Rock Hotel and a Blues themed hotel. And then*







there's Islands of Adventure. This theme park is like Disneyland in that it's separated into various "islands," each with its own identity and feel. This is where we went after Gatorland.

Now the reason we went there, especially in the middle of the day was two fold. First, I really wanted to go on the Spider-Man ride (which was located in Marvel Island...or was it Superhero Island, I forget) and second; we had free tickets

(courtesy of cousin Michael). Of course, there was also Seuss Island, which Faye wanted to take the kids to...so guess where we went first? That's right. First stop was the Cat in the Hat ride. This one was a lot of fun and really followed the feel of the book. Basically, you got into a car and were spun around to face the various scenes before you. At times the spinning got a bit intense, but by the time it was over, you were wishing Mom hadn't come home and you could play with the cat all day. In fact, Bailey got to experience it more than the rest of us since he went on it twice in a row. We had to do the baby swap thing and since there was room for him both times, away he went. After that it was on to the Suess-o-sel, a carousel featuring Seuss designed figures. We were going to ride on "One Fish Two Fish" after that (It's like the Dumbo ride only water shoots out at you randomly and you're supposed to avoid it) but the line was too long and Bailey decided he didn't want to wait.

Now it was time for the adults to have some fun. We headed over to Marvel Island (I'm pretty sure that's what it was) and Faye and I immediately decided we wanted to ride the "Incredible Hulk." Hulk is a big green roller coaster, which shoots you out of the starting area and then sends you through a bunch of loops and curves and switchbacks and boomerangs. Jane didn't want to go on it and Mom and Dad were also against it so it was just Faye and me. We loved it! Well, maybe not "loved." It was fun, but we both agreed the scariest part was the initial launch, which takes you from 0-40 in about 2 seconds. After that it was pretty tame.



Spider-Man was next. This was the one I'd been waiting for forever since seeing it on some Travel Channel special. Generally, the ride is like Indiana Jones, where each car is moving along a track but can be controlled like a motion simulator. Added to that mix are 3D films throughout, featuring all sorts of Spidey bad guys, and you've got yourself one hell of an experience. There were bits where you felt like you were flying, one where you got hit with a stray bit of Electro's shock blast and then, near the end, you got dropped from the roof and were saved in the nick of time by a well placed web. Me, Jane and Dad each went on it twice, taking Faye the first time and Mom the second

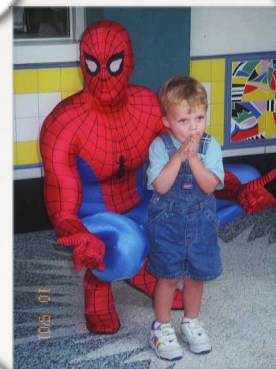




*(someone had to stay out and watch the kids).*

*Back outside Bailey was having fun, running into all sorts of costumed folk, from Dr. Doom and The Green Goblin to Captain America, Wolverine and even Spidey himself. And what did Bailey have through it all? His autograph book. What a lucky boy, huh?*

*Then, as time was drawing late, we hurried around the park, trying to squeeze in a couple more rides. Mom, Dad and I hit the Jurassic Park ride and then we were faced with the*



*Dueling Dragons. These were a pair of floorless racing coasters (red and blue) that intertwined along separate tracks. Jane and Mom were no goes, but this time Dad felt he had to join Faye and I on the ride. We headed towards the line. Since the park was almost closed, we figured there wouldn't be much of a wait so we walked towards the queue with a spring in our step. And we walked.*

*And we walked.*

*And we walked.*

*We walked to the point of ridiculousness. Even with no one there (we ultimately had to wait through only one go before we took our seats) it still took over 15 minutes to walk the length of the line. We decided to ride Ice first (the blue one). We'd heard it was a little smoother (if not as fast) as red. It was amazing.*

*The two coasters take off together and then diverge rapidly. Even though each goes through loops and things they are very different. At times, though, when negotiating an outside loop, your feet and the feet of the people riding the other coaster come within inches of each other. I swear. It was incredibly exciting. So exciting, in fact, that as soon as we got off Ice, we doubled back through an emergency exit and climbed right onto Fire. Like I said, very different, but both great.*

*When we were done, we rejoined everyone else and discovered that in order to explain to Bailey why he couldn't go on the big kid ride, they had sat him in a mock up of the rides seat. It was a very funny sight to see him wit the shoulder harness not getting anywhere near his shoulders.*



*The park was now closed, but we still had shopping to do. So back to Seuss Island where one gift shop remained open. It was also here that discussions (arguments) about where to go for dinner began.*



*See, Jane had found this place in one of the tourist brochures that did a Pirate themed dinner show (like Medieval Times). She suggested it to my folks as a surprise for me, but they turned her down, saying it was too expensive. She explained this to me while we were waiting for Bailey to climb down from Horton's Egg (okay, slight digression. Outside the Car in the Hat gift shop was a nest with a big egg in it and Bailey had climbed on and then was told by some passerby that he needed to stay up there in*

order to make the egg hatch. He wouldn't come down until everyone had gone through a little archway to visit him, pretending to bang their heads every time they went through.) So while all this was going on, Dad was getting impatient and hungry and no one could decide where to go for food.

We finally left the park and headed back to the car through Citywalk (which was chock full of restaurants and shops). Nothing there appealed. So once we were back in the car, Jane pulled out her trusty tourist guide and found a street, which seemed to be crowded with places to eat. Of course, she was giving great directions, which Dad didn't follow and we ended up getting lost.



Several times.

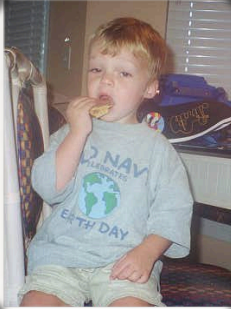
As we went around, no one could decide on what they wanted to eat. It was getting pretty ugly in the van (almost a repeat of Tuesday night). Finally, when we were on some side street and could see the main drag ahead of us, Dad, with some harsh words, slammed on the brakes, spun the car left and headed, with alarming speed, into a parking lot. He decided he'd had enough and we could just walk until we found a place.

Everyone got out of the van and walked around the corner and what was in front of us? The Pirate theatre! See Jane had lied to me and they had all decided we should go there for dinner. The reason dad was getting anxious at the park was that we were running late. As it was, we got there just in time. We sat in the blue section to cheer our pirate, who turned out to be the star of the show.

The show itself was a lot of fun. The food was fairly decent and while we ate, we watched stunts, a love story, sword fights, indoor fireworks, boat races and a Christian being eaten by a lion (okay, that last one never happened, but it would be another interesting theme restaurant, wouldn't it?). It was all interactive, with the crowd participating as both cheering section and as actual volunteers for special events (like contests among the pirates and an army at the end). Afterwards there's a big disco with the actors all dancing which seemed to be a lot of fun, but we were all exhausted so off we went home.

In the van, Bailey decided to regale us all with the phrase "Oh god" over and over. We're not sure why. And when Jane said "I think he means 'oh good'," Bailey corrected her. "No Auntie Janie, Oh god!" So for most of the way home, "Oh God" was our accompanying soundtrack. And when he stopped it was to be mad at Dragon. Bailey was getting tired of the fact Dragon would





only talk in the car and he took it quite personally. So personally in fact, he decided that if Dragon wasn't going to talk to him, he wouldn't talk to Dragon. Remember the heartbreak about not liking the pirate hat? Absolutely pales in comparison. This was devastating. What started out as a joke we never thought he'd buy into had become a source of amusement for the family and a lot of fun for me. And now we'd gone and really damaged a little boy's psyche. Pretty heart rending if you ask me. And when we got back to the house, we decided to try and figure out a way to let Dragon talk to just Bailey. I explained to him that if he concentrated really hard, he could hear Dragon talk in his head. And he tried. He really did. I could see his eyes all screwed up in concentration while he desperately waited for a little "Hello Bailey" to magically sound off inside him. It never came. When I asked if he could hear Dragon, all Bailey could do was say "no" and walk away, disappointed. You know what? So was I.



#### DAY 4 – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2001

*This was it, the end of our trip...and yet we still had things not checked off our agenda. So after packing up the house and trying to reload the van (remember we've all bought a lot of souvenirs) we headed off to Sea World. See the plan was this: we'd all go to Sea World and then, depending on the luggage situation, Jane and I would either stay at the park or go to the airport with the folks. Since our flight was going to be several hours after theirs, we, obviously, were hoping to work out the luggage situation. What we needed to find out was if they could store our bags at the park until we needed to leave. So that was our first stop once inside (we didn't have to worry about tickets since we were covered by our ID cards from Discovery Cove).*

*Well, actually, our first stop was the information desk (they told us we needed to go to Guest Services to find out about the luggage). At the Info desk, I overheard someone else talking about the "special" tours offered. Now, our Sea World, here in Southern California, has a behind the scenes tour, but we've done that and I wasn't sure that's what everyone wanted to do. Until I heard that one of their tours was for the Wild Arctic area and it brought you up close and personal with a Polar Bear. I had no choice, really. So while I went to guest services to check on the luggage, Faye and Jane arranged for the tour.*

*We had our start time for just after 4pm, which left us free for a couple of hours. Our first stop, though, was not to see any fish. Instead it was to see Shamu, who*



*was standing in front of a specially decked out new VW Beetle and posing for pictures. Guess who was right there in line, autograph book in hand? That's right,*



*young Bailey Stone. Jane also got a picture, but that was more because she wanted to see the car up*

*close. Breakfast was fast rising on the to do list, so we stopped off at a patisserie (which is a fancy French way to say bakery) to have a, well, a pastry and some coffee. While we were there, Dolly Dolphin came out to stand by the car. Well, what self respecting autograph collector would have Shamu and not Dolly? None. So off Bailey and I went to get Dolly's picture and signature. Of course, as we got to the front of the line, Shamu wanted to get in the shot as well. It was with great pride I told him to get out of the way, we already had him.*



*So, with picture in camera, we gathered the rest of the gang and headed off to see the fish. Our first stop was*

(as always) the Bat Ray feeding tank. I queued up for food as Jane and Faye got us a good spot against the wall. Then the feeding began. I'm not sure if Bailey actually touched one or not, but Jane did, so that's okay. I still think Bailey had a good time. From there, we went to the Dolphin petting tank. This time, I know Bailey got in good and tight with a dolphin. Again, so did Jane. They have a great service here (which they don't have in San Diego) where someone stands on the other side of the tank with a camera, and as you reach out and pet the critter, they take your picture. It's really serendipity since they don't know who the dolphins are going to go to or how long they'll stay. But once they snap a shot,, someone comes over to hand you a little number and let you know your "animal encounter" has been captured and if you'd like to view (and purchase) the picks, there's a booth just behind you.



We went to look at the pictures but decided we had better ones in the camera so we said "no," (which is odd, because we did buy a lot of pictures this trip).

From the dolphins we went to see the manatees. Jane and I took Bailey and Rya while Mom, Dad and Faye went off to ride the rides (this park has rides). Bailey was none to happy about this, but when the folks came back (they decided the line was too long)



everyone was much pleased. Although we did get a nice view of some of the manatees (and tried to teach Bailey they were also called Sea Cows, but no go).

By this time, it was getting close to 1pm and we had to be across the park for our tour. Off we went, braving the heat (you'll notice, this is the first time I've mentioned the temperature because while it was warm throughout, this was the first day of the oppressive humidity for which Florida is famous) to wait beside the life size bronze polar bear for our guide, whose

name turned out to be Kristi. The first stop on our tour was behind the scenes at Wild Arctic itself. We saw where they keep the animals before introducing them into the habitat and how they care for sick critters. Then it was time for the polar bears!

The polar bear room we went into was actually a training room with the bear separated by a thick piece of one-way glass. We were told that even the trainers don't get in there with the bears. If they need to interact with them, they do it through a thick metal fence or



when the animal is out cold. While we watched, Kristi told us a bunch of stuff about the bear, his natural environments and whatever...Honestly, I didn't hear a word of it, instead I just watched this big white creature walk backwards around his little pool ( I think she explained why he was walking backwards, but like I said, I missed it). Leaving there was sad. But the tour was going to get much cooler.



We all (the whole tour group was about 16 people) got onto a tram and headed over to the penguin enclosure. Then we all went inside a back room where we met a penguin. This time we really did get up close and personal and got to pet the little bird. Bailey did it twice. Of course, since it was 40 degrees inside and 80 out, as soon as we left the cold room, my glasses fogged over like the English Channel in war time. As the tour



ended, we had a nice chat with Kristi and then it was time to say good bye. For some of the family, the trip was about to come to an end.



We all headed out to the van, with both Bailey and Rya asleep. We gathered our luggage and Faye gave me a present. See way back on day one, at Animal Kingdom, she had asked me if I had something from a gift shop. She held it up and I never had a chance to actually see what it was. But being a smart ass (and figuring it had something to do with "It's a Small World") I said yes, I had one. Turns out it was a flat penny holder. Now, since I collect flat pennies (it's the cheapest souvenirs we could find and they're very cool ways to remember places we'd been) and I wanted a new holder since my old one was getting full up, it would have been a great thing to have. Faye said she was going to buy it for me, but since I was a smart ass, she wouldn't. She did, however, throughout the week, start a flat penny collection for Bailey. Well, coming back to the present, Faye did in fact buy me the holder and all the pennies she had gotten for Bailey were in it for me. It was very sweet. And she also had Rya "drop" a "world's greatest Auntie" keychain from Wild Arctic (which matched the one I'd gotten several nights earlier saying "World's Greatest Uncle" from Pirates of the Caribbean). We all said our good-byes and then watched the van drive away. We were slightly disappointed Dragon wouldn't get a chance



to say bye to Bailey, but we'd deal with it. Then, with bags in tow, Jane and I went back into the park.

After dropping our luggage, we headed for the two things we hadn't done yet...the rides. The first one we went on was called "Journey to Atlantis." This was the longest line we waited in all week and it was fairly well worth it. While the line itself tried to explain the "story" behind the ride (something about a Greek fisherman finding a magic artifact that proved the existence of the fable lost city) it got lost in the crowd noise and poor quality video. But the ride itself...that was cool. It starts off as a water ride, leading to a big, big drop. You think that's the end until you start going up again and the ride catches some tracks and becomes a roller coaster. Lots of fun and we didn't get wet hardly at all. Next door to "Atlantis" was the ride I'd been waiting for and was second on my list only to Spider-Man: "Kraken."

Kraken looked great and Jane and I got into line with great anticipation. We could see the loops and twists of the floorless coaster as we got closer and closer to the front. We also made friends with two young kids who were riding without their parents. Once we got to the front of the line, Jane decided it would be better if she didn't participate and so it was up to me and the two kids. Jane went to stand and watch with the kids' parents. The ride itself was great; my favorite coaster of the trip. I discovered that for me, the scariest part of the ride is that first big drop. After that, I'm good to go. With this one, though there were some other pretty scary

bits (like where it looked like you were going to crash into an area that wasn't quite finished).

When I finally came off Kraken, Jane decided she wanted to go on Atlantis again, so she could finish the day with a ride. I decided we should ride in the front of the car, since last time we rode in the back. That was a mistake. See, what happens in the ride after the big drop is you go around a little curve and then, if there's any weight at all in the front, the front end dips completely under the water, literally placing the occupants therein under the water also. Since we were in the front, we got soaked. Jane's comment was that she had never been so wet with her clothes on. It wasn't pleasant.

So we went from there back to the front of the park, grabbed a change of clothes and got ready to grab our own cab back to the airport. Our vacation, too, was coming to an end.

Back at the airport we had a nice dinner at a little brew pub and waited for our flight. The plane was more than half empty so we had our choice of seats (but not a choice of movies, we were stuck with "Legally Blonde"). Flying out of Orlando at night, we saw EPCOT from the air and then the flight attendants lent us a telescope so we could see distant cities.

*We landed, collected our luggage, and headed home, just waiting for the next day when we could go through all our pictures and video from the trip.*

*All in all, it was a great trip, one we'll remember for a long time to come.*

