

Ormand Family Activity

November 2015: California Vacation

Jerri likes Disneyland. It had been a long while since we had our own children there, and she wanted to visit again. Additionally, this year is Disneyland's 60th anniversary. However, it seems to me Disneyland is really a family thing; that is, younger children (not infants), so I proposed that we take some of our younger nephews and nieces from my brother's large family, to experience an Ormand Family vacation with us. This was agreeable to Jerri and Kristina, so we made plans to go over the weekend, and get Faith to ask for time off at the Historical Society (she had no Friday classes that semestre) and then fly back from L.A. to Flagstaff.

On Thursday before that November weekend, Isaac and Mary Kristen were delivered at our home with their suitcases and pillows and a sleeping bag. Four hours later we had collected Faith and left her car at Flagstaff Airport, and we were on our way down I-40. We resisted the inclination to stop at Seligman for ice cream from the Snow Cap, and dinner wasn't at the Road Kill Cafe, it was at Juicy's in Needles. After a long drive in the dark across California, we finally arrived in Los Angeles and the stressful trip through the freeways to Anaheim. Our hotel was a Best Western, one of several ringing the park, conveniently in walking distance of the main gate, and with controlled guest-only parking, so we could leave the van. We would find out next morning that there was a pop culture convention at the Anaheim Convention Center, so the hotel was packed with young people and their cosplay getups.

Early as we could, the next morning we arose and had our complementary breakfast at the hotel, then walked down the main drive into Disneyland, through the lobby of one of the resort hotels, emerged into Downtown Disney, and reached the main gate. After the security checks and cycling through the turnstiles, we had our photo taken in front of the Main Street railroad station.



On Friday, we saw Tomorrowland and Frontierland and New Orleans Square. Star Tours has been made over again. We thought that the Marvel Avengers Headquarters would be a new attraction (replacing Space Mountain), but it was under construction. We didn't bother with the photo event with Captain America and Thor. The line at Pirates of the Caribbean was long, but not amazingly so. The switchover to the Christmas theme was already underway, and thus the Haunted Mansion had a "Nightmare Before Christmas" thing going on - including having the Mansion festooned with orange lights (candles, and what we Tucsonans recognize as luminarias). Lunch was at the Blue Bayou, dinner was at Aladdin's Bazaar, and we watched the light show from a privileged vantage (by virtue of the vacation package I had bought) on the riverfront. It was Mickey as the Sorcerer's Apprentice battling Malificent's dragon - except for Isaac and Mary Kristen, we had seen it before, but it was still good. As the park was about to close, we hoped to see the fireworks over the Castle, but it had turned a bit stormy and windy, so eventually, the announcement came over the speakers that the show was being canceled.



Here is most of the group with the morning light shining on Sleeping Beauty's Castle.

An obliging park attendant ("Cast Member") took our picture in front of the Walt and Mickey statue at the end of Main Street, before the Castle.





To save our feet, we started the day getting from Main Street to New Orleans on the train. I think Isaac and Mary Kristen really enjoyed having their older cousin along on the adventure.

On Saturday, we visited the California Adventure park. I had purchased Park Hopper passes on a package that included a meal plan and a "Magic Morning" (more, later). Park Hoppers are a pretty good deal - you can come and go to either park at will. On the Grizzly River raft ride, Isaac got pretty wet, but he was dry enough to enjoy a drop in the Tower of Terror. Again, lines were long but not outrageously so. My favorite attraction, Soaring, was not open. Mary Kristen, Faith, and I went on the roller coaster while Isaac and Mom rode the carousel. We got to see a production of Aladdin in the big theatre - even though I was challenged to catch up with them in the line after running out of the park to get some jackets we had left in a locker. Dinner was at the Rainforest Cafe restaurant out in Downtown Disney, and then we went back into the park to see the light show. It was amazing. California Adventure is centered on a "lagoon" or lake. In the lake are various fountain nozzles, as well as tubes for fireworks. During the show, the fountains would lay down a heavy mist, and projectors and lasers would illuminate it with video and effects. The theme was a tribute to Walt Disney, the creation of the parks, and *imagination!*

The switchover for Christmas is underway at California Adventures as well.



On Sunday, Faith has to leave us to return to school, and her flight leaves Los Angeles International in the late morning. After a leisurely morning of sleeping in (a little) and another complementary breakfast and a drive down the wonderful L.A. freeways, we get to LAX and discover that American Airlines has two terminals - and of course, we go to the larger one which is the wrong one. Fortunately, we had built enough spare time into the schedule that Faith and I could walk from one terminal to the other and get her to her gate with a comfortable margin. Now, my plan was to depart from LAX and go right up to Santa Monica to see the Pier, but when I got back to the car, it seems that little people were complaining of stomach aches, so instead, we returned to the hotel for a nap. It must have been a little bit fatigue and a little bit homesickness and a little bit strange food, because after lunch at Denny's near the hotel and a rest, they fully recovered. Late that afternoon, then, we retraced our route past the airport and north through Los Angeles to Santa Monica. We looked in some shops and bought postcards and knick-knacks and then went into the amusement park for a few rides.



Afterwards, we went to the end of the Pier and watched some fishermen fishing in the dark, and took our picture with the Ferris Wheel lights over our shoulders.

Next to the public restrooms, there were posters describing Santa Monica's past. Apparently, surfboards came to the Mainland from Hawaii via Santa Monica. Dinner was at a Mexican restaurant at the end of the Pier.





Of course, Santa Monica is also the terminus for old Route 66. We've done the Arizona Route 66 thing, and someday we may go back to Chicago where it starts, but here we are at the end.

Most of the curio shops on the Pier had Route 66 stuff, but this little kiosk was dedicated to it.





Though she is barely visible, here is Jerri at the end of the Mother Road.

"Magic Morning" is the privilege of entering the park an hour before everyone else is admitted. This got us a chance for Mary Kristen and I to run to the roller coaster and get two rides in with no waiting (and not many other people on the car).

When we got off the ride, we found Mom and Isaac on the carousel, so we all took another ride.





Or two.

Our hour of privilege was about over by the time we got over to Car Town. Isaac was really keen on going on the Lightning McQueen ride. We discovered that the transition to the Christmas theme was further along.





Of course, everything is car-oriented here, including Christmas decorations like this sheet steel tree.

The downside of "Magic Morning" is that all the eating places in the parks are geared for lunch and dinner, not breakfast. In order to get here for the opening, we didn't have much of a breakfast at the hotel, so two little kids were pretty hungry after the morning. We got some sourdough samples at the Ghirardelli place (and some malted milk balls), but that didn't go very far. We were ready to leave California Adventure to see if there were more opportunities in Disneyland.

On the way out, we got treated to a street performance by a crew of talented and athletic "Newsies". The theme was "take a chance, step out, and catch your big break", just like Walt Disney did when he arrived in Hollywood with his cardboard suitcase. Mickey and Minnie appeared in the show, and at the end, everyone boarded the trolley and rolled away down the street.





The tree that we saw two days ago has been joined by other decoration.

Upon entering Disneyland, we find that in two days, the original park has now been tricked out for Christmas, too. There are two big trees, one at the circle in front of the railroad and the other halfway down Main Street.



Today, we see Adventureland and Fantasyland and Toontown. I am disappointed that Bear Country Jamboree is gone. I am also sorry that we didn't get across to Tom Sawyer's Island, but you do what you got time for. We try to do all the classic rides in Fantasyland, including the walk-through displays of the Sleeping Beauty story in the Castle (which doesn't exist at Disney World in Florida) and seeing the Wicked Queen opening the curtains and glaring down at the people. Lunch was at the Carnation Cafe on Main Street, and dinner was at the Pavilion. After leaving the dinner place, we were going to go on Star Tours one more time, when I discovered my wallet was missing! The last time I had it out was paying for dinner at the Pavilion, so I went back in the hope that they had found it. They had!

Splash Mountain is a necessity, and on the last descent, Isaac gets totally soaked.



Turns out Isaac is a huge Tigger fan.

Isaac and Mary Kristen learn that neither of them is the Rightful King of England.



Jerri likes lighthouses, so we got her picture in her chrome-plated mouse ears next to Disneyland's lighthouse. The Storybook ride is actually very pretty (even if it isn't a "thrill" ride) of visiting the little miniature settings by boat. There is a new Agrabah and a miniature palace for the Frost sisters.

At the end of the day, the last attraction is Small World. My nostalgic sense is disappointed yet again - in addition to the long-term insertion of Disney characters (like Toy Story figures in the Southwest area and Stitch surfing in the Polynasia area) into the classic Small World ethnic scenes, they have to mutate the legacy Small World theme music with Christmas carols.



Once again, we find a good spot outside Tomorrowland in hopes of seeing the fireworks over the Castle, and this time, they put on the show. Not only does Tinkerbell zip out over the Castle on a wire, but a Nemo character accompanied her, and they stayed out on the wire for quite a while. Obviously the Tinkerbell actress can't suffer from acrophobia. After the fireworks were over and we spent one more shopping fling in the Main Street Emporium, we were done with the Disney parks and ready for other adventure in the morning.

Tuesday is a slower-pace sleep-in morning, limited only by having to get to the complimentary breakfast before it closes down. Then it's a drive over to San Pedro and Ports O' Call. For some reason, most of the shops are closed, so we bide the morning looking at boats tired up along the wharf and shipping coming and going from Long Beach Harbour until we get lunch at a little Mexican place. I was hoping for fresh fried fish at the many seafood shops here, but Mom isn't much of a fish person. Then we leave the mostly-deserted Village and cross the Harbour again to the Long Beach Aquarium. Which is really an amazing place - the first thing we see upon entering is a three-story glass tank with three divers pointing out the fish, and one of them is wired up for audio (talking in a diving mask underwater fascinates the geek).

I took a few pictures of divers working in the tanks to point out to Faith that she could use her SCUBA training *and* work in a museum.



Mary Kristen and Isaac check out the penguin tank.

Interesting little alcove into the penguin tank for a closer look at the swimming birds. Not unlike the viewing domes at the Sealife aquarium in Phoenix' Arizona Mills mall. But less comfortable for larger guests (I got in there with them, briefly).





Two youngsters petting the sharks and the rays.

And then washing their hands. Not sure what the hygiene threat is; I don't think sharks carry salmonella like tortoises, or leprosy like armadillos. Maybe it's just to clear the sea salt from your skin.



The aquarium tries to engage young people by having a "scavenger hunt" - a sheet of paper with clues to find particular exhibits that have rubber stamp presses to mark a find. I got most of them, but Isaac was very keen on finding all of them. The two youngsters got their prizes for completing their search, right as they were closing the doors for the evening.

Long Beach has a harbourside pathway for running and jogging, and you can rent bicycles and peddle around. Their tourism board is very active, and has a set of maps of various areas in the city that you can visit on walking tours and see old buildings and beautiful homes and quirky shops. About all we have time for at the end of the day is to poke around the shops in the Long Beach "seaport village" district. Earlier, I had discovered that I had left my hat in the Anaheim hotel. I need a broad-brimmed hat to protect my thinning head and cancer-smitten ears from the sun, and I find a suitable replacement in a hat shop with a

diverse stock. Then it's dinner at the lighthouse restaurant. I finally get my seafood! After dinner, we drive back across L.A. to recover my original hat from the hotel, which fortunately had put it in their "lost and found" bin. Now I have two!

Wednesday is a special treat day. A couple of years ago, we had taken the ferry out to Catalina Island with our adult children. Today, we are going to repeat the trip with Isaac and Mary Kristen.





Because of the way our day was scheduled, we have time for just a few shops. Not enough to visit the Casino, and there's not much there to interest little kids, but while we are exploring the back streets of Avalon, we find a miniature golf course.

Fist-pumps of victory!





Mommy shoots for the loop-the-loop. It was a pretty nice course, but some of the holes were *really* tough, and we ran out the clock and had to finish hurriedly so we could grab a quick pizza lunch in a little Italian hole-in-the-wall with lots of photos of movies stars who had visited Avalon.

One of the reasons we came back to Catalina Island was to find out if the little submarine was better for seeing the fish than the glass-bottom boat we rode last time. While we wait for boarding, we sit at the end of Pleasure Pier and look at the sailboats moored at buoys and seagulls begging for our lunch leftovers. This is the view looking north toward the Casino.





This is the view looking south toward Lover's Cove where we are bound, and the little submarine tied up at its dock.

It's really a semi-submersible; the cabin is underwater, but the deck and "conning tower" never go under. The hatches don't really seal. But all said, I believe it *was* better than the glass-bottom boat. Like the boat, you can purchase fish food "charges" that you can launch to attract the fish to the viewing port, which puts them inches away instead of feet as in the case of the boats.



Apparently there had been some environmental changes since we were here last; the kelp forest was very thin, and we didn't see much variety of sea life - no seals or porpoises, and only a few of California's special protected Garibaldi fish. The tour operators assured us that the state of the kelp forest comes and goes. It was still a fine tour, in spite of the silly "nuclear submarine on a dangerous scientific voyage" theme that was playing over the P.A.

After debarking from the little submarine, it is getting to be time to board the return ferry. On the way, one more look at the Casino and the homes and hotels of Avalon climbing the hills above the harbour.



Here's our ferry. Both times we managed to find four seats in a row, and on the return trip, we got seats by a window. Not that we stayed in them - going outside with the boat in motion is a lot more fun than sitting in airplane-style seats and reading magazines and tourist info. The boat just roars along, throwing spray in your face as you look off the side, and the jets kick up a frothy wake at the back. I have to hold onto my new hat!





As we approach Long Beach, in addition to tankers and freighters at anchor outside the harbour, we see a giant cruise ship.

The cruise ship is the "Princess", and at her stern is the "Queen Mary". A lot of royalty in this photo!



Long Beach Harbour is one of the largest and (when the longshoremen are not on strike) busiest commercial seaports of the world. The sun sets over the loading gantries.



After the ferry docks and we debark, we immediately find our van in the parking garage and get back to the freeway as quick as we can for the several-hours-long drive down to San Diego in the dark. The next day is our last in California. I was thinking we could get a harbour cruise charter, but Jerri wanted to visit Seaport Village, and we don't have time for both. As it turns out, we almost didn't have time for *anything else*, as we see *all* the parts of Seaport Village, about twice as much as we had ever seen before. Including an ice-cream snack while listening to synthesizer music by a fellow who, after he was done playing his set, walked around with his CDs for sale.



While Mommy is in a shop, I enjoy a quiet moment with my niece and nephew on the seawall.

We spent a lot longer in Seaport Village than expected. After getting back in the van and driving back and forth in downtown San Diego looking for a way out, we finally get back on the highway and drive around to the long, high bridge to Coronado Island, which is my family's favorite San Diego beach spot. We have a late lunch at a Paradise Bakery, where we notice a large number of local school children (that is,

middle-schoolers and high-schoolers) squatting around tables doing homework and socializing. It's clear that the shopkeepers aren't very happy about this state of affairs, as we witnessed more than once an employee challenging a young person about their behaviour or whether they were going to buy anything. With our lunch under our belts, we move the van to a spot along the beach wall and take our swimsuits to a public restroom - the bathhouse is closed for renovations, and the city has moved a four-seat restroom trailer out onto the sand.

Mary Kristen and Isaac, finally on the beach in San Diego.



Dad is in the water, taking a photo of Isaac in the water and Mommy at the edge, looking for shells. Yes, the water was cold. Yes, it being November made it colder.

We are not far from the Hotel del Coronado. Someday, we will stay there, and just write off the expense to the experience. I've heard later on that you don't have to be a guest to enter the hotel to visit the shops and the restaurants inside.



We don't get to stay very long before it gets almost too dark to see. But we *do* get to see a glorious California sunset over the Pacific.





After we get back to the hotel from the Island, Mary Kristen starts preparing for bed. "No! It's time for dinner at a fancy restaurant!", we tell her. In about an hour, after changing clothes (and wiping the sand from between our toes) and an entertaining evening drive to just the right spot on Harbor Boulevard, we find our destination - Tom Ham's Lighthouse. Yes, another

lighthouse restaurant. Did I mention that Jerri likes lighthouses? It is elegant but not formal, with big windows looking out over San Diego Bay and the lights of the downtown tall buildings across the water. It is also late; we are among the last stragglers to be seated, and some of the entrees are already sold out, but we enjoy our meal and the conversation of memories of the day.

Friday has come, our day of returning. We pack up the van with our bags of laundry and damp swimsuits and seashells and mementos, and start back home through Yuma.

On the east side of the Colorado River, we know we are back home and that our 2015 Disneyland and Southern California adventure is now a thing of memory and photos.

