

Ormand Family Activity

October 2017: Orlando Vacation

I'm not sure how long it's been going on, but every year for the past several years, the TOW missile system users community has a convention - the TIDE (TOW International Data Exchange - such is the length to which defense types will go to come up with a snappy acronym). I have never been, as the TIDE is more for business development and sales than technical anything, so I can't really justify going at company expense. This year, however, I have been invited by our international business development lead for a meeting with some other companies contemplating a new helicopter launcher. But I know I'll get in trouble if I go to Orlando on business without telling Jerri, so I tell her - and together we make plans, buy tickets, and arrange for Faith to take some days off and fly down there, and before long, it has turned from a business trip into a family vacation.

The plan is for Jerri and I to fly out Sunday, have a relaxing Monday, go to Seaworld Tuesday, and then to Disney's Magic Kingdom on Wednesday, breaking away mid-day to fetch Faith at the airport and then return. Then EPCOT on Thursday, Universal Studios (for the Harry Potter attraction) on Friday (when my business meeting is), finish up with Disney's Hollywood Studios on Saturday, and fly back together on the following Sunday. Furthermore, because Jerri is dealing with tendonitis in her knee and knows that all the walking will not be good for her, we arrange to rent a wheelchair, to be dropped off at the hotel before we arrive and picked up after we leave.

The flight out is uneventful. Jerri manages to pack everything into two suitcases, so we can each check a bag and pay only for the one each. At the Tucson airport, you check your bags with real people, and the counter lady was helpful and arranged adjacent seats for both legs into and out of Dallas. It was a long layover in Dallas, so we took the airport shuttle/train from the terminal we were arriving and departing from to Terminal D, where the nice restaurants are, for a leisurely lunch. When we arrived in Orlando, it was a dry evening, but by the time we got our bags to the rental car place, it was starting to rain. I had reserved a midsize car through National's Emerald Aisle, but with the Aisle, you simply pick whatever car you want; by this late hour, everything was gone except for mini-vans. I had looked at the map during our planning time so I knew about where the hotel was, but was relying on the GPS gadget to get us there. But the stupid GPS gadget wasn't working - it

seemed to insist we were in Texas. So following my memory of the map and relying on freeway signs, and surviving a few minor wrong turns, we got to our hotel. While Jerri went inside to check in, I fiddled with the GPS gadget to see what the deal was. Somehow, it had gotten into "GPS Simulator" mode - it gives the appearance of working but it doesn't actually work. Great, real useful. I took it out of Simulator mode, and poof! It knew it was in Orlando at the correct time.

Thankfully, there is a TGIF restaurant on the corner of Kirkman and Major that is open late. We don't finish dinner until after midnight.

Monday was relaxed. Sleep in late (sort of; at this time of the year, Orlando is three hours later than Tucson, so late Orlando time is our normal time in Tucson), get breakfast at the nearby IHOP, and drift down I-4 in the direction of today's ultimate destination: Disney Springs. On the way, I see what we saw last night through the rain, and what I had looked up from Orlando's tourism site - the Coca-Cola "Eye", which is a giant Ferris Wheel. Since we have lots of time today, I just get off I-4 and mosey up International Drive.

I take away the impression that Orlando is Florida's entertainment city; whether it was before Disney World, who knows, but now Universal is here, and Legoland, and Seaworld, and a dozen other tourist attractions. International Drive seems to be the focus for all this tourism attraction. Seems to me it serves much the same purpose as Highway 76/Main Street through Branson. There are numerous hotels, shopping areas, and nice restaurants all conveniently located together. There is a trolley that runs up and down the Drive and to nearby locations (such as our hotel near Universal). There are attractions in their own right, such as a Ripley's Believe-it-or-not and several mini golf parks. The Orange County Convention Center is on International. And the Eye.

And the Orlando Visitors' Center, where we get some useful Disney information and Jerri meets some friends. But we don't actually see the Visitor's Center until we are on our way to Disney Springs. First - the Eye.





The Ferris Wheel continuously rotates, and passengers ordinarily just step into or out of the cars, but they stop it long enough for me to wheel Jerri into ours. The cars are air-conditioned (I was surprised as to how *hot* Orlando was in October) and has a central seat or bench and small displays that help you identify the scenery as you slowly ascend to the apex.

It's a pretty nice time, although a little pricey. Florida is too flat to see anything much, even though the displays tell you such-and-such is out there in this direction. We pick out the geodesic sphere at EPCOT. That's pretty much it, other than a bird's eye view of the parks and activities and the tops of hotels in the vicinity.



And downtown. You can see downtown Orlando from here.



I had intended to drive through downtown on this trip, see the impressive tall buildings and whether Orlando is generally as attractive as Phoenix or Chicago or Fort Worth (or intimidating like Los Angeles or Dallas). Unfortunately, we never had time, other than getting fairly close after a few wrong turns later in the week.

What was a bit surprising is that the Coca-Cola Eye was not associated with a Coca-Cola store. Coca-Cola is a *big* thing in the South (it has a significant presence in downtown Atlanta, and even little Huntsville, Alabama has a tour of the Coca-Cola bottling plant), so we were expecting a store with all kinds of Coke glasses and polar bear toys and branded apparel. Nope. Just a little Eye tourist niche which was part of a larger tourist "mall".

At Disneyland Anaheim, the shopping/dining district outside of the parks is Disney Downtown. Here, it is Disney Springs, on a much larger scale, and on a central Florida-style lake.



Note the balloon. Yes, it is a ride, but this afternoon is quite breezy, so it wasn't operating. Not an issue; we've already had our high-altitude experience today.



We visit many little shops (mostly associated with Disney merchandise; e.g., Star Wars and Marvel). I saw the maps, that there are *food trucks* (happy sigh), but they are (unsurprising) *DISNEY* food trucks, with lots of Disney corporate culture and money and sanitization, therefore uninteresting. Instead, lunch is at Planet Hollywood, having a burger and watching music videos and a James Bond collage on the huge hemispherical screen. Ah. The Coca-Cola store is *here*, at Disney Springs.

Lots of walking (well, for one of us, anyways), lots of shops (LEGO store - with girl-oriented building toys... doesn't making them "girl-oriented" defeat the entire equality thing?), lots of time in the ENORMOUS Disney Store. At the end of the day, for dinner, we can see the Rainforest Cafe volcano erupting across the water from the Disney Store. After getting in, I wheel Jerri over to our table and she attempts to step out over the footrests like she has all the time up to now, but trips - and escapes injury by grabbing a passing server! From that point on, we are careful to put the footrests up before she gets out of the chair.



We spend a fair bit of time outside fruitlessly hoping to catch the volcano erupting with a decent camera. It does not appear to operate on a regular schedule.

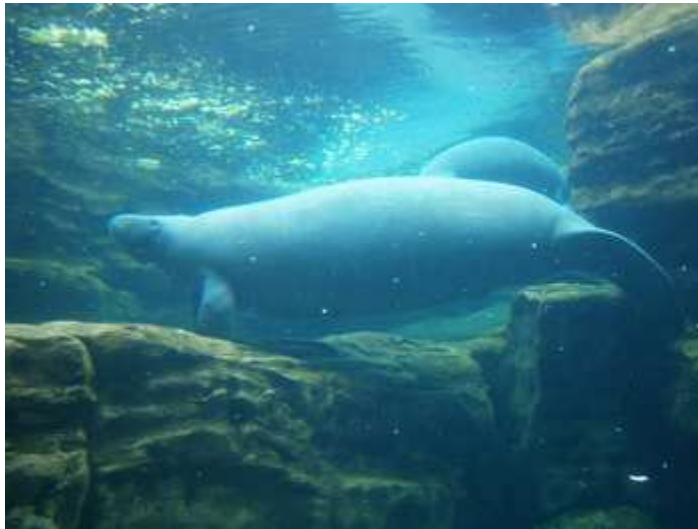


Near the Rainforest Cafe is a seafood restaurant - the Boathouse - and next to it is an attraction where you can buy a tour of the lake in an *Amphicar*. You can't drive it yourself; there's a pilot, but it still looks like fun. Yes, it's watertight, the wheels turn for land operation, and there's two screws in the back for water propulsion. I watch one motor up to the ramp and then drive up the ramp out of the water.

Planet Hollywood all lit up at night.



The next day is a mostly-leisurely day. We get up in time to catch the hotel breakfast (pretty good, actually; credit to the Comfort Suites on Major Blvd.) and then proceed back to International Drive and Seaworld. We aren't in the park hardly any time at all before it starts raining again. Doesn't last long, but it rains on-and-off the entire day. Dolphin show. Pet the rays. Push Jerri up the hill to the Pacific scene with sea lions and harbor seals.



Seaworld rescues manatees in the Florida coastal waterways after being injured (or orphaned) due to watercraft or fishing equipment or submerged junk. They are treated and recuperate until they are deemed fit to return to the wild (if possible). The manatees were next to the sea turtles and a 3-D film show about baby turtles hatching and scrambling to the sea.

Across the lagoon is the Shamu stadium. We watch the show while the rain falls on the overhang over the seats. Afterwards, we go see the walrus and the beluga whales. Somewheres there is a little newborn girl walrus, per the notices.

We notice there are paddle boats for a fee on the lagoon. Yes. *Flamingo* paddle boats. Because Florida.

Then a show with trained dogs and cats and birds and pigs. I think Faith should work at training her cats to do maneuvers upon command. Then the trademark Clyde and Seamore show with the otter and the sea lion.

Seaworld thinks they must have rides to compete with the amusement parks. There are two or three roller coasters in the park proper, and the big Atlantis water ride just off to the side. We don't have the time or inclination to do these. But we are more or less forced onto a ride in order to see the penguins. No food or drink, which apparently includes the drinking water in Jerri's bottle. Stupid. The ride turns out to be a gyrating car supposedly following a baby penguin dancing through his icy world - think "Happy Feet". Food and drink and especially water in a bottle were NO threat to this ride. Stupid.

At least we get to see the penguins at the end of this entirely gratuitous ride. I like penguins ("It's Tux!"), but I've seen better penguin exhibits. After all, it's Florida.



Seaworld closes early-ish, while it's still light in the sky, enough to go up International Drive and appreciate the Convention Center in natural light. We settle on a Carrabba's restaurant in the same plaza as the Eye. Wheeling Jerri up from the parking garage to the back side of the restaurant, we come to a door that departing guests hold open for us. Turns out its a rear exit, and we have to go all the way up to the front for the host anyways. Oh, well. It's a good dinner.



Afterwards, I pause long enough to steady the camera against a lamp post for a nighttime shot of the Eye. Impressive. Beautiful. It doesn't appear to be moving - maybe they don't operate it at night. That would be a shame, as the sight of the city lights from the top might be more interesting than the mostly featureless green Florida swampland.

The next day, we get up a bit earlier than yesterday to get into the Magic Kingdom and see some stuff before going to fetch Faith. The Magic Kingdom is on the north side of a lake, and the parking areas are on the south side. There are three ways to get there: There is a ferry. There is the monorail, which also goes to the resort hotels. Or, you can stay at the Grand Floridian or the Polynesian, two mega-expensive Disney resort hotels, and take a motor launch to the park. We choose the ferry.



We also have to activate our Disney park-hopper passes. These are cards with an RFID device that work at the gate in concert with a fingerprint scanner (the card is associated with your biometric, to

prevent theft). Or, we could have spent \$12 for a bracelet instead of a card. Finally through the gate, we don't have a lot of time and the lines are l_o_n_g. 80-minute wait for the Peter Pan Neverland ride. We settle for Small World and a 30-minute wait. Unlike Disneyland Anaheim, in which Small World is a large affair in its own section of the park, at the Magic Kingdom, Small World is a "storefront" ride like the other attractions in Fantasyland, smaller, but without the annoying Disney cultural injections into the classic display (no Stitch surfing with the Hawaiians, no Toy Story characters in the American West section). Nice. Then we do Bear Country Jamboree - another attraction which persists at Magic Kingdom but has been removed from Disneyland. Lunch at the Harbor House on Liberty Square. We tried the nicer Liberty Tree Tavern, but without reservations, it was an hour wait. An hour for a meal, an hour for a ride; without restaurant reservations (made weeks in advance) and getting advance on-line Fast Passes, you would spend the entire day waiting.

We discovered how the Fast Pass thing works. Yes, getting Fast Passes in advance is better, because if you get them the Day-Of, you are queued up with others and probably can't get in until later. Maybe hours. Still better than waiting in line, as you can do other stuff until your time arrives (and you have the hour starting at the assigned time to show up), but the later in the day your Pass gets pushed, the fewer you can do. But you can only have three Fast Passes; you have to use up *all* the on-line Fast Passes before you can get any out of the machines located around the park. So it isn't perfect - but it is still a long sight better than standing around in a line for 80 minutes. It also forces you to be selective and choose what you actually want to do. *You can't do it all*. You would have to return to each park for several days to try to do everything.

I notice another difference between Magic Kingdom - which has a Liberty Square (a recreation of Colonial New England) - and Disneyland - which does not have one: A "garden" of flagpoles with the flags of the original thirteen colonies. Pretty easy to make out Maryland's and Rhode Island's flags. There's also a Liberty Bell in the little garden. There's probably not one in a hundred park visitors who appreciates Liberty Square, let alone the monument to the first thirteen states.

Time is getting short, but I think we can take the Disneyland Railroad from Frontierland to Main Street.



Yes, it is an actual working steam locomotive! Small scale, and propane-fired, but it still has to take on water for the boiler at the stop now and then.

It starts to rain while riding the train back to Main Street. We struggle into our 1990s Disneyworld rain ponchos and get from the station to the monorail terminal. We take the monorail around the lake to the parking areas, and then zoom down the toll road back to the airport. We have to sit in the cell phone waiting area for quite a while, with the rain coming and going, because Faith is having her own adventures: Her alarm was accidentally turned off and she didn't wake up until an hour before her flight, and after a frantic and anxious effort, she got to the gate after boarding had already started. But then, after everyone had boarded, the pilots detected a mechanical problem that required the maintenance people, who didn't show up for some time. Arriving in Dallas late, she barely had time to get to her connection. And *again*, after everyone had boarded and the plane was ready to leave, the crew discovered a seat that would not latch into the "full upright position", and so everyone had to wait for the mechanics to show up and fix it. Finally, she arrived at the Orlando airport. Orlando is... different than other airports. There

are four structures with the gates that are separate from the terminal, with shuttles on rails moving people back and forth. There are two shuttles for each set of gates. When Faith arrived, *both* shuttles to *her* set of gates were broken. With no other way to get to the terminal, she was stuck for an hour until the airport could fix the problem.

But here she is, and we get back to the park and take the ferry across the lake. Here is the little family group in the little usual professional photo at the entrance to the Magic kingdom.





Inside, we discover more Disney photographers are available for shots in front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle.

Now that Faith is here, we can use the Fast Passes and dinner reservations. Space Mountain (not in Disneyland anymore). The Carousel of Progress (not in Disneyland anymore, which is a real shame; I *really* like this attraction). Haunted Mansion (*not* yet tricked up for Halloween). Pirates of the Caribbean. The Enchanted Tiki Room.

That's about all we had time for before dinner at the Crystal Palace. Our reservation was the same time as the fireworks display over the Castle; fortunately, we sat near the window facing the Castle and could see some of it while we dined. This was a buffet meal - *excellent*, though expensive. And, while we were there, the Winnie-the-Pooh story characters went through the dining area greeting people and posing for photos.



After dinner, we drift around the Castle for a bit and then down Main Street, where Jerri and Faith spend a fair bit of time in the Disney Emporium before we pass out the gate and join the massive crowd waiting for the ferry. The Halloween decorations have started to go up; I'm a bit surprised they aren't further along for a holiday coming up in just three weeks.





The next day is Thursday, and we get to spend the entire day together at EPCOT. This is my favorite park, as it is the one that is really unique from the other Disney stuff. Faith's, too. (Jerri's is the Magic Kingdom.) Here we are at the sphere that we could see from the Eye.

The first thing is to use our Fast Pass at the Mission: Space ride. Faith is elated.



Turns out that EPCOT is hosting an International Food and Wine festival, so not only are there the usual ethnic restaurants, but there are food booths all around the central lake.



the festival is Figment, the little purple dragon that was created explicitly for an EPCOT attraction (*Journey Into Imagination*).

Figment being such, I can understand why EPCOT would choose it as a mascot for anything,

but I would have thought that Remy the epicurean rat from *Ratatouille* would have been a better mascot for such a gourmet event.



For me, the real jewel of EPCOT is the World Showcase, with areas or "pavilions" dedicated to the culture of ten foreign countries.



We work our way around the the World Showcase toward lunch at the fancy Chinese restaurant. The first stop is Mexico - and it starts to rain as I push Jerri up the ramp to the doors in the Pyramid. Inside is a tribute to the Dia de los Muertos festival, and a Mexican marketplace (sorry, but I've seen *much* better stuff in Tucson, such as at Old Town Artisans), and a little boat ride with the Three Caballeros theme (the 1944 animated-plus-live film with Donald Duck, Jose the parrot, and Panchito Pistoles the Mexican rooster).

Skip Norway for now, and go directly to China for lunch at the Nine Dragons. While we are enjoying our fancy (and pricey) Chinese lunch, we notice the rain is really picking up. When we are finished, we stay out of the rain by moving through the fancy Chinese shop and covered marketplace to the auditorium where we see the excellent 360-degree wraparound "journey through China" movie. The rain is letting up a little now, and we have a Fast Pass for *Test Track* in Future World, so we zoom back up front (zooming is possible with Jerri in a wheelchair) only to discover that the ride is closed due to the rain, but they will honor Fast Passes through the rest of the day once the ride reopens. With this assurance, we return to the world tour.

Skip Mexico and go to Norway. We peek in the little cramped Norwegian stake church, in which the exhibit has been changed from the original Norse history (with Harald Bluetooth, etc.) to the Norwegian inspiration for the *Frozen* movie. We also note that the original *Maelstrom* ride has been changed to a Disney *Frozen* theme - and the line, even for Fast Pass, is impossibly long. Faith gets this interesting chocolate Viking helmet pastry before we move on.



Skip China. Been there, done that.



Skip Germany for now. Stop in Italy for some gelato and to pose at this Venetian fountain. Ah, Venice!

Skip America. Stop in Japan and spend a great deal of time in the Mitsukoshi department store, looking at all things Japanese, and mostly pseudo-Japanese/American pop culture. Namely, manga and anime characters and stuff from Studio Ghibli animated films. Faith stocks up on the latter. The *real stuff*, like potware and kimonos, are very pricey for casual tourists (who are already overspending themselves). I find it fascinating that Mitsukoshi developed from a clothing store in 1673.

Stop in Morocco long enough to look around the *souk* (market). France is mostly eating places, but it also has an excellent circle-vision tour of France - except at first, we get in a long line thinking it is the line for the movie, but finding out after a little while that no, it is the line for meeting the Disney princess character Aurora. I guess it says something that so many people would stand in line to have their small children photographed with a fictional character rather than go inside to experience something real.

Next is England, with lots of shops. With some Disney influence (Faith has to get a Peter Pan coffee mug), but some British cultural presences as well (Doctor Who TARDISEs, Beatles stuff, tee-shirts with Monty Python quotes. Fancy teas, British candies, woolen scarves, etc.)

And finally, Canada. A shop with mooses and Mounties and silly snow-themed clothing. And up some stairs (because we can't locate a wheelchair ramp) is a small reproduction of the famous Chateau Laurier (of Ottawa) and this lovely fake landscape with a lovely fake waterfall.



Down the stairs (which Jerri negotiates because we can't find the wheelchair ramp) is a theater with yet another excellent circle-vision wraparound 360-degree movie about Canada, narrated by (Canada-born) Martin Short. After the movie, we emerge and discover that the wheelchair ramp is also the path to the steakhouse, so I go fetch the wheelchair while Jerri waits. I arrive to find her chatting with one of the Canadian hosts (in EPCOT, the country pavilions are staffed by natives from those countries; makes me wonder about Morocco and China) who is actually a native of Quebec. I ask him a question that always bothered me after several visits to Alberta, seeing bilingual product packaging and road signs but detecting no French *anything* from the people I met. In America, especially in the Southwest, there is more-or-less compulsory English and Spanish language education; why is that not the case in an officially bilingual country like Canada? He explained (and it may be more from his Quebecois viewpoint) that Canadian schools are organised a little differently from American schools, that children are exposed to both languages, but at "college" (roughly American high school) age, they choose whether to continue a bilingual education. Apparently, few do, although our Quebec friend speaks good enough English to get by in Florida. I couldn't get Faith to test his French.

At this point, we have done all the EPCOT World Showcase we are going to do. We poke around the gift shops (Figment dolls, cooking equipment) for a bit and then head on back to Germany for another gut-busting Biergarten buffet feed. Delicious German food (I wish we had a German place in Tucson), and the same Bavarian Oktoberfest band as the last time we were here, the Sonnenschein Express. Great

fun. Internal stuffedness.

sonnenscheinexpress.com

Okay, now we are *really* done with the World Showcase. Time to see if Test Track is open. It is, and we go in to design our car: aero molding, tire types and sizes, engine type ("plasma", something, obviously sci-fi), and of course color and styling. I could *not* force it to design a Model-T. Then you "test" it by getting in a car ride (no actual steering or pedal work involved, as I had been led to believe) and going through a test course (roller coaster) to test acceleration, braking, maneuverability, etc. It was okay, except that as we were leaving through the Chevrolet showroom (the ultimate purpose for the attraction), Jerri discovered she had lost her iPhone! After some brief but frantic bag searching, we started back to the ride, but met a "cast member" carrying a suspiciously familiar cell phone. Yes, it had been recovered and was on its way to Lost-and-Found! Yay!

Jerri and I had wanted to do the "Soarin'" ride (same as in California Adventure in Anaheim), but as we emerged from the Test Track place, the exodus from the park is underway. Maybe next time. Like I have noticed, *you can't do it all*. At least, not in one day.

On the morning of the next day, Friday, I put on my working clothes ("business casual") and drive to the Doubletree where the TIDE has been running. It's over now, and the hotel staff are taking down the draperies and platforms and chairs, and there are some stragglers packing TOW equipment out to their rental cars. But no meeting. I call my BD friend and discover that the meeting had been changed from 8:00 to 10:00! Oh, well, on with the plan: I continue to drive across Kirkman to the Universal parks, walk in, go through Security, continue to the Studios park, and get the tickets. Oh, and I discovered that there are two parts to the Harry Potter experience, in two parks, and you need what amounts to a park-hopper ticket to see both parts; therefore, I convert our single-park tickets to dual-park tickets. Then I return all the way to the hotel, leave the tickets for Jerri and Faith, and turn right around and walk the half-mile from the Comfort Suites back to the Doubletree. I meet our BD lead and my Tucson and El Segundo helicopter friends along with a number of other men from other companies (US and Canadian), and we have a fruitful meeting. Then I walk the half-mile back to our hotel and change back into my play clothes. Did I mention how warm it is in Orlando in October?



In the meanwhile, Jerri and Faith have prepared for the day and have driven across Kirkman to the Universal Studios park. This is the view they see from the parking garage. The peak of the Hogwarts castle is way back, in the center of the skyline here. They enter the Studios park, poke around, and do a ride while waiting for me.

Now equipped for the day, I walk the half-mile back to the Kirkman intersection, cross it, and walk another mile to the stair to the Security area. Now I am back to where I was earlier. In a little while I am in the Studios park texting Jerri.

Wow. It is smokin' hot in Orlando in October.

Some explanation of the Universal setup is in order. They are apparently trying to follow Disney's lead, or maybe there's just that much to Universal to justify it, but there's actually three parks: Universal Studios, Islands of Adventure, and Volcano Bay. There's also a City Walk, a collection of shops and eating establishments which is "free" (except for the parking), and therefore similar to Disney Springs but smaller and more "adult" (late night, liquor, etc.). There are also resort hotels on the Universal grounds, just like Disney. Volcano Bay appears to be a water-park. Islands seems to be more a celebration of Universal-produced themes like Jurassic Park, Spiderman, King Kong, Dr. Seuss. and the like. The Studios are (mostly) done up like movie sets, especially a early 20th Century New York City.

Like the Priscilla Hotel for Single Young Ladies, from *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Jerri and Faith were hanging out here just as I was walking up. Just previous, I had been invited to participate in a "scene" by a "director" trying to assemble a "cast" from park visitors. Now that we are all back together and ready for Harry Potter World, we find the "hidden" entrance to Diagon Alley.



The first order of business is lunch, and the Leaky Cauldron is right at hand. There's a long line to the counter, but they are handling it well - the line ends with a host directing your party to an available counter operator to take your order. You get your drinks (including "butterbeer" and "pumpkin juice") and a placard, and take it to a second host who hands you off to a waiter as tables become available. No having to hunt for a place to sit on your own! Then your meal finds you via the placard.

Of course, the Leaky Cauldron presents a suitable Harry Potter, Diagon Alley impression.



Outside again after lunch and ready to see the sights, the Weasley Magic Shop is right there.

There's a lot of pseudo "magic" stuff for sale, as well as "normal" ("muggle"?) clothing and knick-knacks. It's also crowded. In fact, all of Universal Studios is packed today. We look around a bit, but Faith is anxious to get her wand.



While Faith is in Ollivander's wand shop, selecting her wand (or rather, having her wand selected for her based on personality traits), Jerri and I are out in the crowded street. The Gringott's goblin bank is at the head of the street. There is a ride inside, which might have been fun but it has an amazing line. There is also a dragon on top, just like in the movie. At intervals, the dragon spews a propane-powered fireball.

There are a few real shops in Diagon alley, but mostly it's prop storefronts. There's also a dark "Knockturn Alley". Lots of places to use the wand, but there's a subtlety to it that escapes most people... including Faith. After feeling that we've seen all we want of Diagon Alley, it's time to go back out the "hidden" exit to the King's Cross train station next door, and show our dual-park tickets to the attendants. We

then join a truly mind-boggling line snaking back and forth across a wide underground room. It's so long that midway, the park has a refreshment sales booth. We are in this line for at least an hour, and probably longer.

But eventually we get to the staircase (and accompanying handicap line for the elevator) and emerge at Platform 9 3/4. We didn't even have to push Jerri through a brick wall!



We stand in a shorter line waiting the arrival of the Hogwarts Express. It isn't a real train, it's more like the shuttle at the airport - and there's only one of them. It goes to the other park. It comes back. If they had two running in parallel, the line downstairs would not have been near so exasperating.

After we board the train and it departs, we discover that it's not really a train ride at all. We don't see real scenery. Instead, the "window" is a video screen showing a simulated English countryside with flying cars and Dementors and other themes from the movies. The interior window is frosted glass, with other scenes projected as shadows. And, when we arrive at the Hogsmeade end (in the Islands of Adventure park), we discover that it is raining. Seriously.

We again don our old Disneyworld ponchos (and Faith her new one, bought yesterday at EPCOT and not really used) and sally forth into the rainfall that is heavier than any we have yet seen. Remember that the park is crowded? That means any possible place to get out of the rain, like this open-air snack place, is totally packed with other guests. It isn't steaming hot anymore (I think I would prefer the hot sunshine), and the wet coolness and the cloudy gloom adds to the Hogsmeade "winter" motif.



One of the places to get out of the rain is the candy shop. Which of course is packed, so rather than shuffle around the aisles in a herd of wet ponchos, I go back outside in the rain and leave Jerri and Faith to buy novelty chocolates and disgusting "all-flavor" jellybeans. Yes, they really have earwax and vomit flavours.

Here I am out in the rain, inspecting another wand effect location. Two, actually; waving the wand at the window causes the "fireworks" in the shop window to move around and lights to flash, and waving the wand at the kettle over the door causes the "pixie" to tip it over and dump a load of water. We try to get Faith's wand to work. A park employee comes over to give us some advice, but we just can't seem to get the technique right.



The rain eases up some as we leave Hogsmeade and move up the hill to the Hogwarts Castle. There is a ride in here, and the wait isn't terrible, so we enter. Faith tangles with the crowd in the locker area to secure all our bags. Then the line to the ride snakes through the halls of Hogwarts, with dioramas here and there with animated characters enacting scenes. The ride itself is quite interesting - the "car" is on a large articulated arm (think, industrial robot) on a track that moves through the ride, and part of the scenery is real and part projected video of Harry and Ron flying their brooms over the peaks of the castle. Of course, the car sways up and down and back and forth as we fly our brooms trying to keep up and escape the pursuing dragon. It was pretty good.



After the ride, the rain has pretty much stopped. It is also late, and closing time is an hour off. We look around the Castle exterior a little bit, and buy some more "butterbeer" off a wagon. Faith finds a frosty friend with Harry's owl, Hedwig.

We follow the crowd moving slowly out of the Islands park, past the Dr. Seuss attractions, past the ramping-up Friday-night nightlife in the City Walk, and to the parking garage. Neither Faith nor Jerri took care to remember where they parked the car, so there was some fun going up and down in the elevator to different levels and pushing Jerri in the wheelchair back and forth in the garage, but we did eventually find it. Amusingly, while the park can be entered from the Kirkman side, there is no exit from the garage to the same side, and we are forced to get all the way back on I-4. Just as well, since it's dinner time now, and we're going back to Disney Springs to get some.

When Jerri and I were there Tuesday, we noticed another dinner place called "T-Rex" modeled on Rainforest Cafe but with a dinosaur or paleontology theme (with the millions-of-years indoctrination, of course) and a gift shop with baby stegasauruses and tyrannosauruses and such. When we returned here tonight, T-Rex was our destination, but I put in our name and learned that the expected wait time was an hour and a half! Phooey on that. We walked a bit further along the waterfront to where a big restaurant done up like a rear-paddle riverboat was ("Paddlefish"), and pretty much got right in. After a delicious meal taken next to the windows over the lake, watching the Amphicars cruising around in the dark, we visited a few shops and then ended our evening.

On our last day in Orlando, we visit the Disney Hollywood Studios park. This photo is from later in the morning when we come across a Disney photographer doing portraits outside the Star Wars area.



Of course, most of the Studios is committed to Disney's big-money film property, Lucasfilm's *Star Wars*. The first stop is to claim our Fast Pass at the *Star Tours* ride, followed by a long poke-through at the Tatooine Traders shop, and then roll back to the Center Stage area in the middle of the park to watch the First Order troopers march through and declare martial law while firing their roman candle blasters. After the squad had marched off and the now-subjugated crowd dispersed, we continued on through the Studio gate seen above into a courtyard packed with strollers, left the wheelchair among them, and went into the "launch bay" where we saw a film of the making of *Star Wars* and a preview of the upcoming picture (*very much like the "special features" on the Star Wars video discs Jerri always watches*). After the film, the audience continued on into a museum of *Star Wars* props and concept models.



like this First Order TIE fighter. It's hard to tell anymore in a film what scenes are purely Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) or models (like the first, superior Episode IV Star Wars movie) or a mix. This is an awful big model not to have appeared in a scene at some point.

I'm sure this rebel cap was certainly on an actor's head in real scenes.





The museum ends in a gift shop (as nearly all Disney attractions do). Darth Vader greets you as you enter the shop. Maybe to Force-compel you to buy the expensive stuff. This Vader was obviously a model; however, the shop had (apparently real movie) costumes like a Vader rig and Stormtrooper armor - for sale - at fantastic prices.

After this, we exit the courtyard (after finding that the park employs a person just to compact the strollers in the courtyard, and the wheelchair has migrated quite a distance from where I left it) and join an audience watching a production by costumed "cast members" on the Center Stage. The stage is equipped with two amazing roll-up screens (flexible?) consisting of bright day-viewable LEDs. The screens roll into place and display clips from the films while the actors run out on the stage and perform a dramatic recreation, twirling their neon lightsabers and discharging their roman-candle blasters. It was pretty good.

One of the things Faith wanted to see was the 3D Muppet show, which is at the far south end of the Studios park. Same as in Anaheim's California Adventures. When we emerge from the theatre, Jerri is hungry for lunch, and it is about time for our reservation at Mama Melrose's Ristorante Italiano. Jerri finally convinces me to go in and ask in advance of our reserved time, and even though I was certain that they would not, based on our experience at Magic Kingdom, they seated us immediately. Another enormous (and expensive) meal.

After lunch, we drift back to the central plaza and, with some help from a passing "cast member", locate the Walt Disney museum. Inside is the story of Disney's life, from his stay in the Missouri town that became the inspiration for Main Street USA, through his Army stint, and breaking into the animated cartoon business in Hollywood and the subsequent challenges and successes.

Toward the end of the museum was a theatre presenting a film about Disney's life and the inspiration and creation of Disneyland. Outside the theatre was some props and costumes from other films, like these from *Doctor Strange*



Maquettes are little clay figures made by the artist as a three-dimensional model for the animators' users. Faith noticed some *Brave* figures, including her favorite, Merida. She has been quite put out that she hasn't encountered a Merida character for photos or an autograph.

After the film, it is time for our Fast Pass at the Tower of Terror ride. We start up "Sunset Boulevard", and then Faith and I leave Mommy to look through the shops while we run on up to the ride (still here, not in Anaheim anymore) (or, rather, the same ride has been re-themed in the Anaheim park, so it isn't the "Tower of Terror" there anymore) and get right in. After the ride, and after the obligatory gift shop at the end of the ride (where Faith gets some Tower of Terror memorabilia), we meet up with mom and return across the park to the Indiana Jones stunt show.

Before the show, the "casting director" picks some volunteers from the audience to be "extras", and entertains the audience by instructing them in some exaggerated acting moves and poses. Then the show starts - fairly authentic-looking, with the "director" and the tech experts setting up the scene, calling for "action" (complete with the clap-board), and the execution of an action-filled Indiana Jones adventure scene. At one point, the "casting director" is instructing the "extras" what to do in the market-place fight scene, and she calls over the heroine actress for a demonstration. The heroine just *thrashes* the poor "extra"! But when it's done, he hops to his feet and is presented as a professional stuntman who was planted in the audience and "volunteered". The show then continues for a little while, but then it starts to rain - hard. The audience is under a roof, but the set area is not, so they have to cut the show short because of the weather.

Our dinner reservation at the Brown Derby is a little while off, but in the hopes of a repeat of earlier, we put our name in hoping for an earlier seating. The lobby is crowded with other people wanting to get out of the rain, and we stand in the somewhat less crowded area next to the restrooms for a while, watching the rain come down in the street outside. We then sit to an excellent (and even more expensive) fancy dinner served by waiters in shirts and bow ties in a room intended to be a reproduction of the original Brown Derby restaurant complete with celebrity caricatures on the walls.

After dinner it is late and dark and there's nothing more we can do today; like all the parks, as I've said, *you can't do it all* in a day, but we've come the closest with Hollywood Studios.

We spend the rest of our early Saturday evening packing everything we had brought and everything we had acquired on our vacation into three bags for check-in. Our flight didn't leave until noon, so we weren't anxious, and after rising at a reasonable hour and having breakfast, we arrive at the airport without incident more than an hour before our flight. Then the adventures begin. There is no ticket counter, there are only the ticket kiosks and bag checks, so there is no helpful counter agent to arrange our seats near each other. Then the TSA line - what a farce! Everyone gets in a single line which snakes back and forth between the ribbon pylons, and then splits up for multiple document check stations. Behind the document check stations, everyone gets in another single line that snakes back and forth before splitting up for multiple scanners. I remark to the document check agent that Orlando must have the wait-in-line-for-a-ride deeply ingrained, and he laughs. Then, the scanner people are extra conscientious: ALL electronics have to be out in a bin, including Jerri's Nook reader, which we have *never* bothered with before, so her backpack gets held up for them to take the Nook out and send it through by itself. Stupid. And then the bag with

the prescriptions and health pills gets held up for a close inspection including a chemical detection wipe. There's *nothing* in the TSA rules about pills, and we have never had problems with the medication bag before. Good GRIEF!! Between the insanely stupid line arrangement and the extra-secure screening, it takes an hour to get through the Security check. There goes all our time margin. Fortunately, the shuttle out to the gates is working today, and we get to the gate just as boarding starts.

Because we didn't pre-check-in, we are in a late group, and by the time we get to the boarding scanner, the crew announces that all the storage bin space is gone, and people need to check their carry-on bags. Which Faith does. Then we board, and slowly get to our seats in the back of the plane, and notice that, back here, there's *plenty* of overhead bin space.

The flight to Phoenix is uneventful, other than Jerri in her middle seat being trapped next to a large man. We arrive at Sky Harbor. The Phoenix airport is arranged with the gates in long parallel branches, like teeth on a comb. Of *course*, your connecting flight is at a gate *all the way at the other side*. There's no way Jerri, even without her knee condition, is going to get there in a half hour. Fortunately, there are electric carts for disabled people, and one happens to be nearby, and I get his attention. After rebuking me that I should have arranged for a disabled pick-up at the gate at the previous airport, he allowed us to climb on and whisked us all the way down to our gates, just as they start boarding the flight to Tucson. I gratefully tip the cart operator, and hope that our bags kept up. The rest of the trip is fine; the airplane goes up, it almost immediately descends, circles around a Tucson shining in the afternoon sun, and lands. Our bags did indeed keep up. Faith tells me where she parked the car, so I leave them on the curb and hoof it to the economy lot and find the car all the way on the opposite side of the parking lot. Soon we are home, unpacking all our treasures from the bags.

In retrospect, it was a fun vacation. No, I didn't see any of the TIDE, but at least I got my important meeting in. Monday was the only day it didn't rain. Nobody got sick or injured, not even when tripping while standing up out of a wheelchair. In spite of her adventures, Faith did arrive in Orlando. It was good that we got the mini-van at the rental place, as it was ideal for hauling the wheelchair. Having the wheelchair was *great*; not only did it ease the strain on Jerri's knee, but we got around much more quickly that we would have without it. No, we didn't see everything - *you can't do it all* - not without staying much longer than we did. And, as long as we stayed, and as many nice meals as we had (Jerri noticed that we were scheduling more of an *eating* vacation than a *seeing things* vacation), it turned out to be a very expensive

vacation. It would be nice to return to Orlando someday in the future, after our finances recover, and see other stuff in the area, maybe more along International Drive, and maybe even a return to Disney, as long as we are disciplined enough to see the attractions we missed this time rather than repeating ones we've already done, and to go easy on the fancy lunches and dinners.