

**Dear Family,**

*"Pushing the tired or discontented beyond their capacity will spoil the day for them—and you...Be prepared to respond to members of your group who poop out. Hint: 'We've driven a thousand miles to take you to Walt Disney World and now you're ruining everything' is not an appropriate response."*

—The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World 2009, p. 303.

It's only an 870-mile drive from Silver Spring, Md. to WDW, but as someone who spends half of every family vacation just trying not to be a jackass (often without success) the preceding paragraph struck a chord.

The first person to melt down was usually Grace, whose concept of Florida is not so much a place as it is a state of being surrounded by adoring princesses. I remain in awe of the actors Disney hires to portray princesses who react to every little girl with a seemingly genuine enthusiasm that would make you think it was the princess who waited in line for 30 minutes to see your daughter, and not the other way around. This was very nice for Grace and, to some extent, her older sisters. If there were no princesses around, however, Grace usually just wanted to go home.

But we managed to have a good time anyway. The trip was made possible in part by the generosity of Grandma and Grandpa Kent, who met us in Orlando on Sunday evening and put us up in a three-bedroom, three-bathroom, two-kitchen, and (most important) four-TV villa at one of their timeshares. Grandma and Grandpa—who, it's entirely possible, have more timeshares than there are weeks in the year—slept in the more modest two-bedroom villa adjoining ours. In exchange for this generosity, Grandma and Grandpa—who live in the Pacific-time-zone city of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho—were treated to their grandchildren (and impatient son-in-law) banging down their door at 7:30 a.m. so we could arrive at the parks before they opened and beat the crowds.

[Arriving early, as it turned out, proved unnecessary as we rarely encountered a line longer than 20 minutes all week (except for princesses), and most were considerably shorter.]

There was some discussion early in the week of having girls take turns "sleeping over" in Grandma and Grandpa's spare bedroom (just for fun, not because we didn't have more than enough beds in our place). This proposal lost whatever traction it had when people started throwing up.

Monday at Disney's Hollywood Studios (formerly "Disney's MGM Studios") passed without incident. Then, on Tuesday morning, Hannah kicked things off by throwing up in "her" bathroom. In what was in retrospect a fit of cockeyed optimism, we attributed the episode to everything from dehydration to excitement and went to the Magic Kingdom anyway. Hannah rode Space Mountain and Buzz Lightyear in Tomorrowland. Then, somewhere in Fanta-

syland, between the Winnie the Pooh and Peter Pan rides, she threw up again.

I can't imagine the vomit stayed on the ground long. Disney has this uncanny, almost Mary-Poppins-like ability to clean up messes before you even realize you're making them. We noticed this first at the Studios, where one of the ubiquitous old men clad in white coveralls with brooms and dustbins was cleaning up stray popcorn literally as it was falling from our containers.

Notwithstanding Hannah's illness, we pressed forward, and, owing to the miraculous lack of lines anywhere (except to see those @#\$\$% princesses), we were able to do just about everything we wanted to do in the Magic Kingdom in a single day (a feat that I don't believe is humanly possible during the busy season).

Tuesday night, it was Crystal's, Sophie's and my turn to throw up. We spent some time the following morning recuperating and made it over to Epcot sometime that afternoon, forcing down some food at a Cinderella "character dinner" that evening (hopefully the pictures turned out). The next day was Disney's Animal Kingdom, where it was Lucy's turn to throw up. Crystal and I took Lucy and Grace home (Lucy threw up again in the car) and left Hannah and Sophie with Grandma and Grandpa to finish the day at the park. On their way home Sophie threw up in Grandma and Grandpa's rental car.

By Friday morning everyone seemed to be feeling better, so we went back to Epcot for a long and reasonably normal day. We finished off the week Saturday at Sea World (where admission was free thanks to Crystal's Uncle Don, who is a person of some consequence at Sea World-San Diego).

There are, of course, many more details than these, which I'm purposely sparing you because 1) there isn't room, and 2) I can think of few things more tedious to read than a detailed account of *someone else's* trip to a bunch of Orlando tourist destinations. (I'd rather read about people vomiting.) However, if you're interested, you can make up your own details using the pictures [here](#).

All things considered, it's been a good week. We pulled the kids out of school, but, with a teacher in-service day Monday and classes cancelled Tuesday and Wednesday on account of snow and ice, they ended up missing only two days. I read where President Obama was incredulous that snow could close area schools, something that never happens in Chicago. I guess that just goes to show how little time he spent here in four years as a U.S. senator if he's just learning that now.

Speaking of which, if your only purpose in reading this month's letter is to learn whether I followed through on my plan to bike to the Inauguration (see last month), I'm sorry to report that the weather (and my mother) won. Hannah and I arose Tuesday morning prepared to go, but temperatures in the teens and a blustery winds convinced us otherwise. So if you thought you saw me on TV, that was somebody else.

Have a nice month. Love, Tim et al.

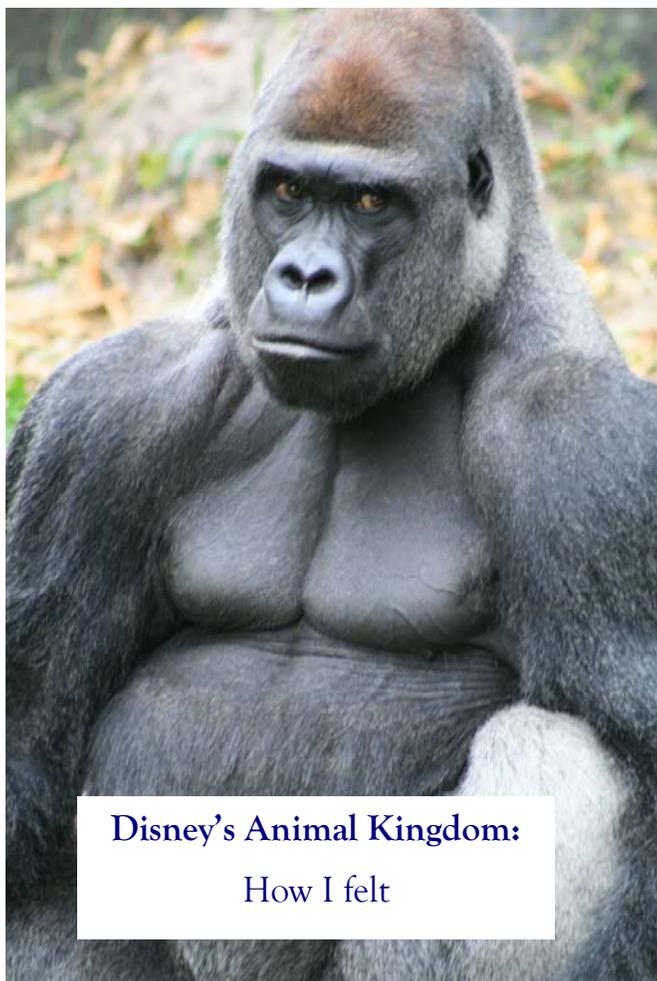




### The Magic Kingdom

Left: January 2009

Right: December 2005



Disney's Animal Kingdom:  
How I felt



Grace's definition of Florida



Left: Everybody outside Pirates of the Caribbean. (Grace was happy when it was over.)

Below: Toy Story Mania with Grandpa at Disney's Hollywood Studios





Epcot