



SUMMER 2012 JOURNEY

[Home](#)[Universal Studios](#)[Sea World](#)[Busch Gardens](#)[Journey's End](#)

Introduction

In the summer of 2012, my family and I decided to take a trip to Orlando, Florida. We hadn't really been able to afford very extravagant vacations up until that point. Financially we were in a comfortable place, but not enough to afford cruises or trips too far from home. Maybe if the attendees were only a few people my mom and her husband could swing it, but in total there were 7 people living at our house. My mom, my little brother, her husband, his two sons, a friend who was living with us, and myself. Even before my friend moved in, the total head count would be 6 people. So I could certainly see how taking a vacation to far away places could be a little off the price range even if my mom and her husband made a comfortable living.

Luckily my mom got a promotion at her job that year in February. Along with the promotion, my mom got a decent pay increase, and got her thinking about possible vacation ideas for the summer. My mom said that she always wanted to take us to amusement parks and show us the ocean, but up until that point she never had the opportunity to do so. With her making more money, she realized that a trip to Orlando would be plausible. She and her husband, Jim, then sat down and planned out the trip. They decided that if they were gonna spend all the money and time to go there, then they would make it count. They picked three parks for us to visit during the vacation. Universal Studios because we were all pretty big fans of movies, and my mom knew I in particular would enjoy the movie themed park. Sea World was the second one, because my mom knew we'd love exploring all the ocean creatures and seeing the orca show.

For the final park, they chose Busch Gardens because they heard it had a lot of great rides and was also some what of a zoo as well. Needless to say, all four of us were excited about the trip.

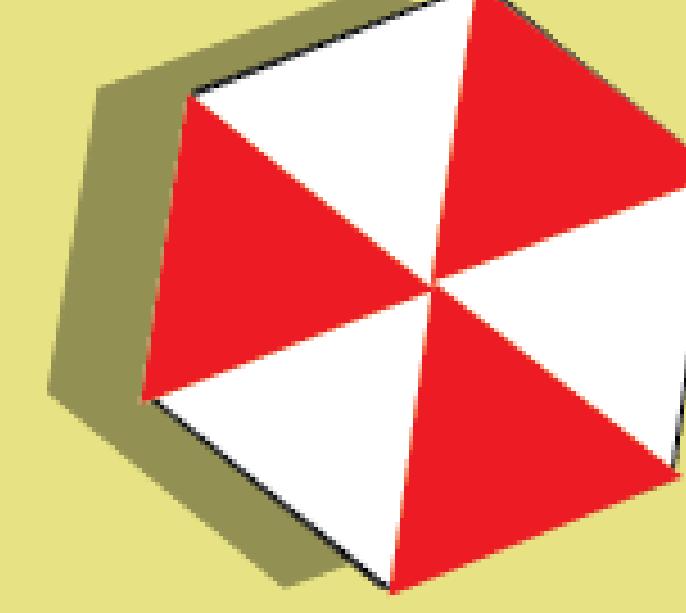
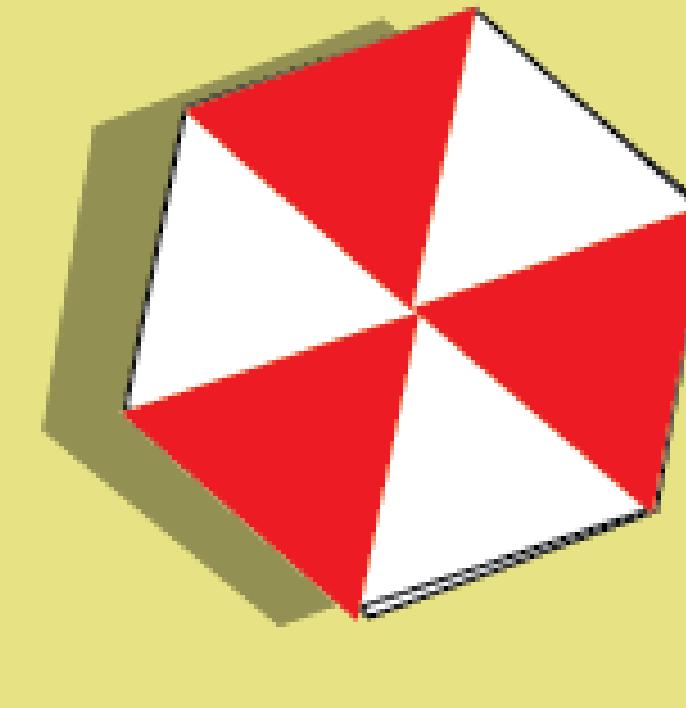
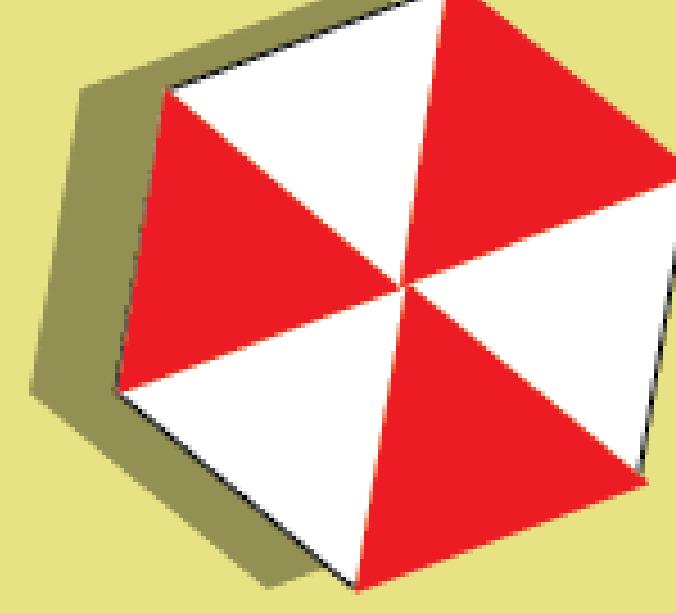
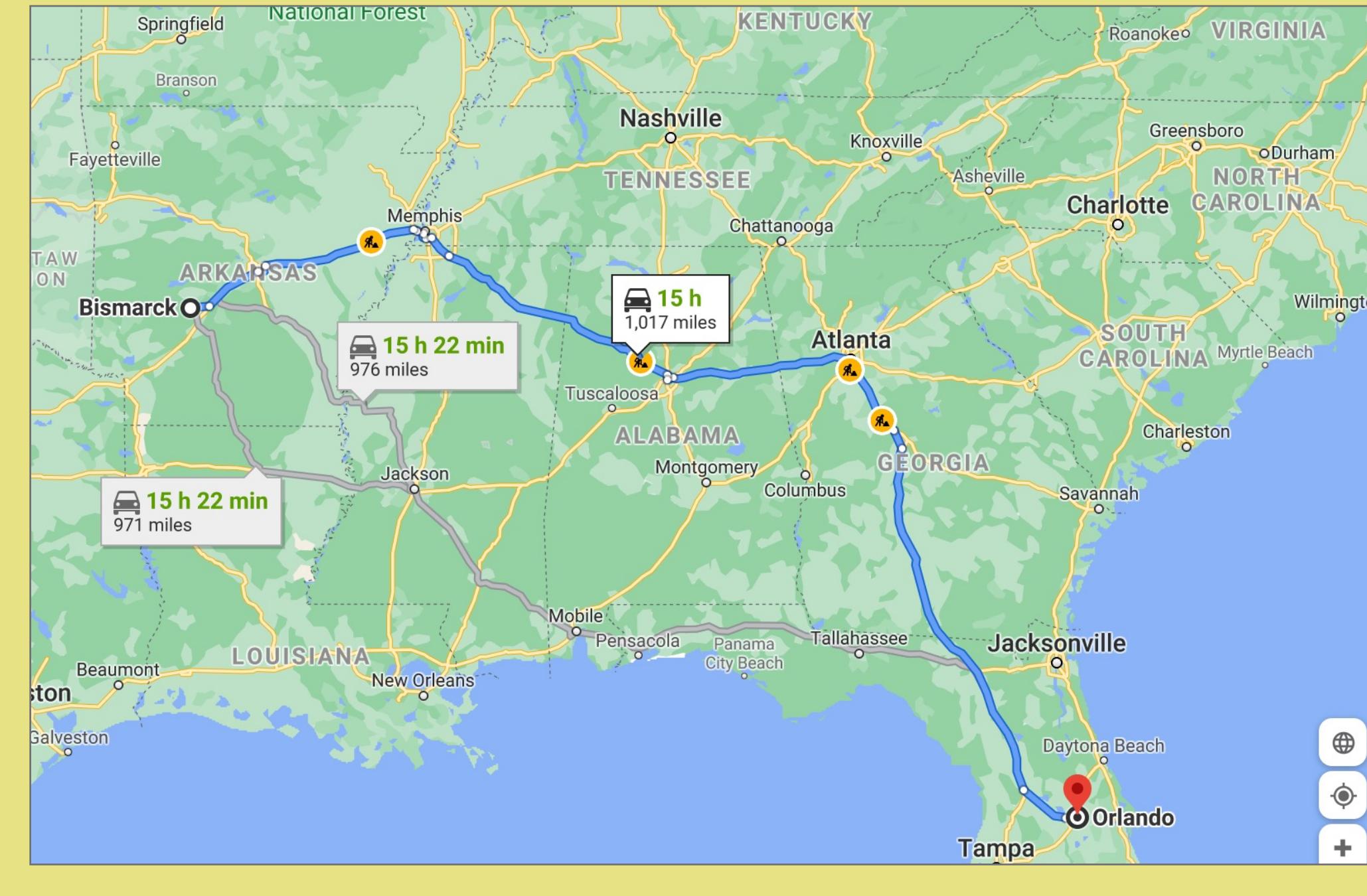
That following spring my stepbrother Trent (the oldest of the two boys) and I became good friends with this guy at school named Chris. Chris was very arrogant and a bit egotistical, but his charisma distracted you from that. He was a very funny guy and though he could be a jerk I still wanted to hang out with him for the most part. His family was moving, and Chris was pretty upset. At the time he was dating my other friend Ashlee, and didn't want to leave her and have to break up with her. I felt really bad about the situation and decided to ask my mom if he could stay with us so he didn't have to move. After a few days of deliberation with Jim, they agreed to let him move in. This brought our head count from 6 to 7 people. Plane tickets for 6 was already questionable for the vacation's budget. So the addition of Chris was confirmation that our mode of transportation for this trip was going to be driving.

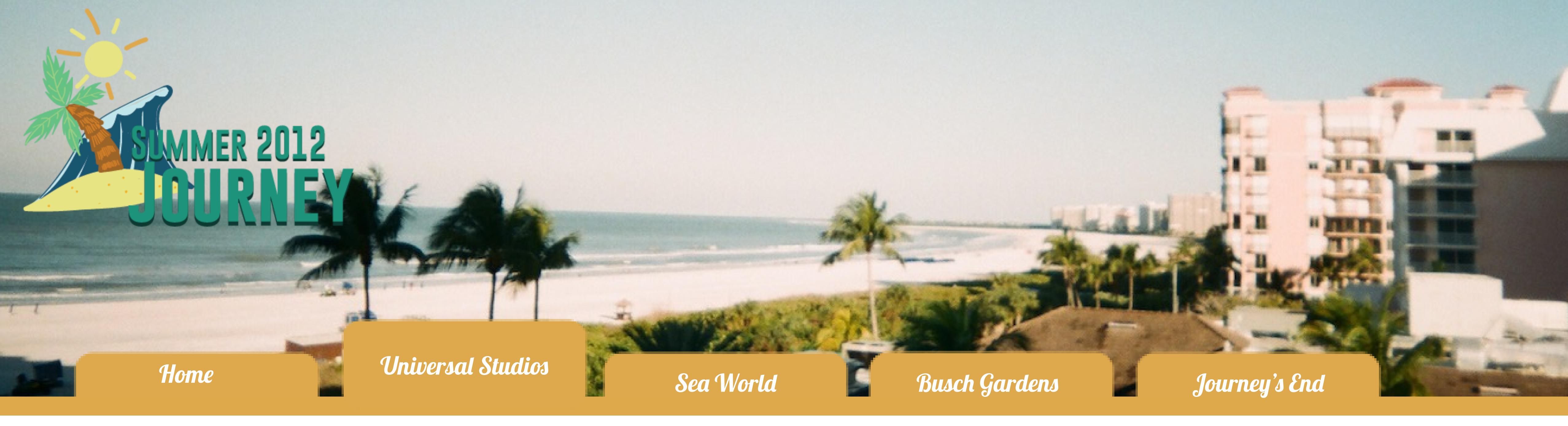
My mom rented a large van that could hold us all. With all the bags and passengers in, we had a decent amount of space, but little did we know how long 15 hours in the van would be. The drive was pretty brutal. Three moody teens listening to music in the back, two loud 12 year-olds playing video games in front of them, and two adults just trying to make it to Orlando. Anytime we stopped to get gas or food, we all had to get out and stretch our stiff muscles. It was also really tough to sleep in the van, at least for me it was. After 15 hours that felt like months, we finally made to Orlando and I was dazzled by the scenery. Up until this point, I had mostly only stayed in rural areas. Only occasionally going to cities like Little Rock or even more rare we would sometimes go to Dallas. Orlando was a tropical city though. In my 15 years on earth prior to the trip, I had only seen a place like Orlando on TV. Seeing it in real life was pretty cool and exciting.



The Road to Orlando

Below is a map of the route we took on the trip. In case you wanted a more in-depth look at what the journey via van was like. Feel free to click on the map and it will open it up on Google Maps or continue on with retelling of my journey on the next page!



[Home](#)[Universal Studios](#)[Sea World](#)[Busch Gardens](#)[Journey's End](#)

Universal Studios

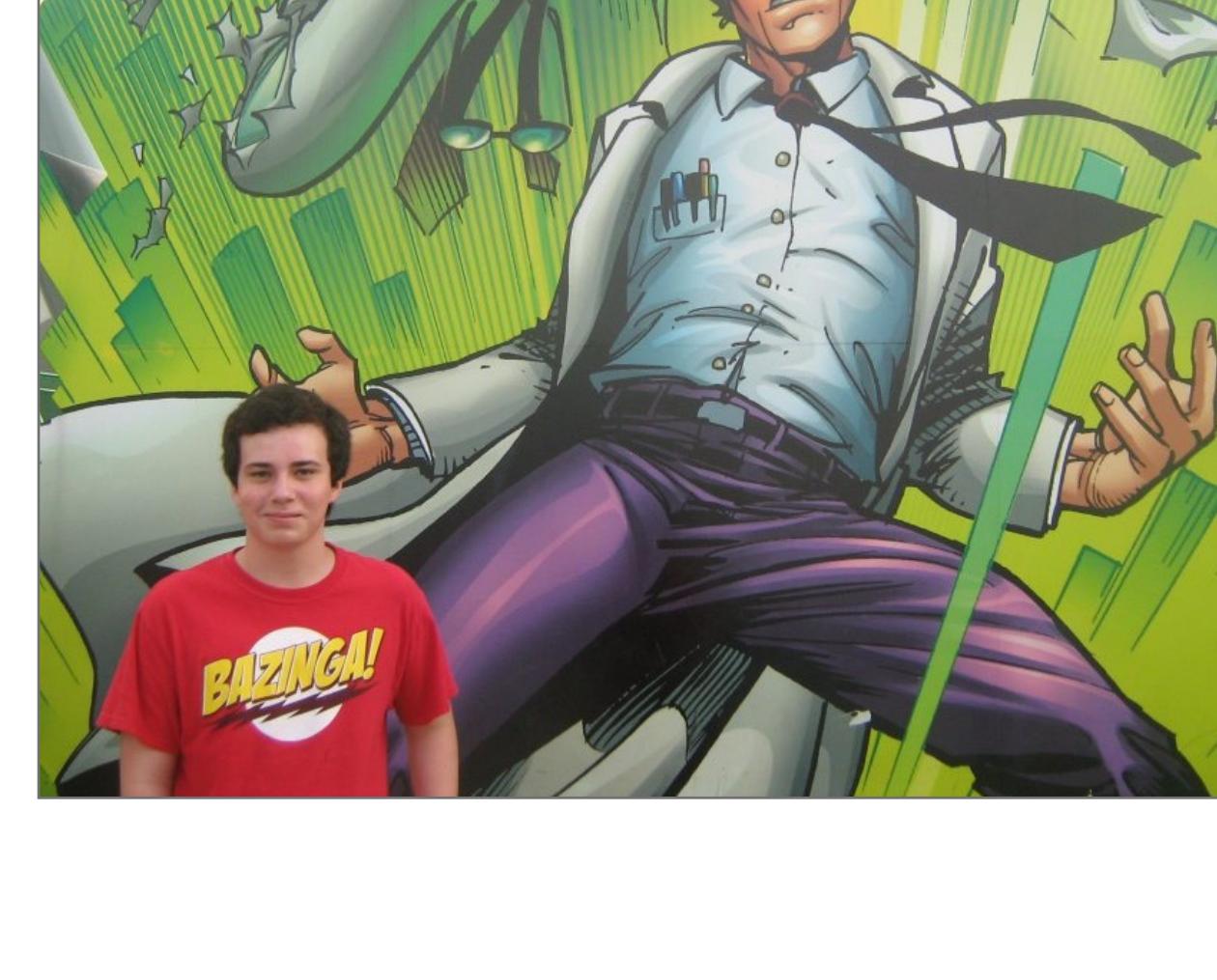
We finally made it to our hotel and checked in to our rooms. The adults and younger boys had one room, and us three older guys (Chris, Trent, and myself) had the other room. The adults knew us kids were stir crazy from the drive, so despite them being exhausted they took us to Universal after we ate our breakfast.

The first day at Universal Studios was very, very excited. I wanted to take pictures everywhere because it had so many sets in the park that looked like a real studio backlot. I was in heaven. There was one problem I had though, which was my fear of heights. A mixture of that fear and all the horror stories about roller coasters breaking down made me very anxious as Trent and Chris expressed a desire to ride a roller coaster called "Rocket Something" or "Something Rocket".

I couldn't find the roller coaster on the resort's site with their current attractions. The roller coaster made sick to my stomach just looking at it. PaWe ended up spending a good 5 hours at the park that day. I watched as passengers got on and watched as the ride started. The passengers were taken to a starting point where the coaster went vertical and all the riders waited there like that for a few moments. Inevitably, they were shot up the first ramp roughly 6 stories high, and then shot straight down the other side falling back to earth. Just that start had me shivering. I was honest with the others that I didn't feel too comfortable with the roller coaster. So Jim went with Chris, Trent, and Bret (Jim's youngest son) to line up with everyone else for the death trap. While they did that my mom and I took my little brother, Paul, to a ride we all would definitely like... "Revenge of the Mummy"!

All three of us were a fan of the Mummy movies starring Brendan Frasier that Universal Studios put out in the late '90's and early 2000's. It was kind of a childhood dream come true in a way. I remember being young and seeing the advertisements for the park's Mummy ride playing before film on its VHS tape. Finally, I was going to experience what that commercial teased me with for so many years. I was not disappointed. At least, I wasn't disappointed to extent that it ruined the ride for me. Of course the ride couldn't meet the wild expectations of a 6 year-old me, but for about 15 minutes I was guided through a mummy's tomb and thrilled by his animatronic undead goons jumping out at me. In total from the overall trip, I think my mom and I went on that ride about 8 times. We just enjoyed a lot, and the lines moved surprisingly quick for it being one of the park's big sellers.

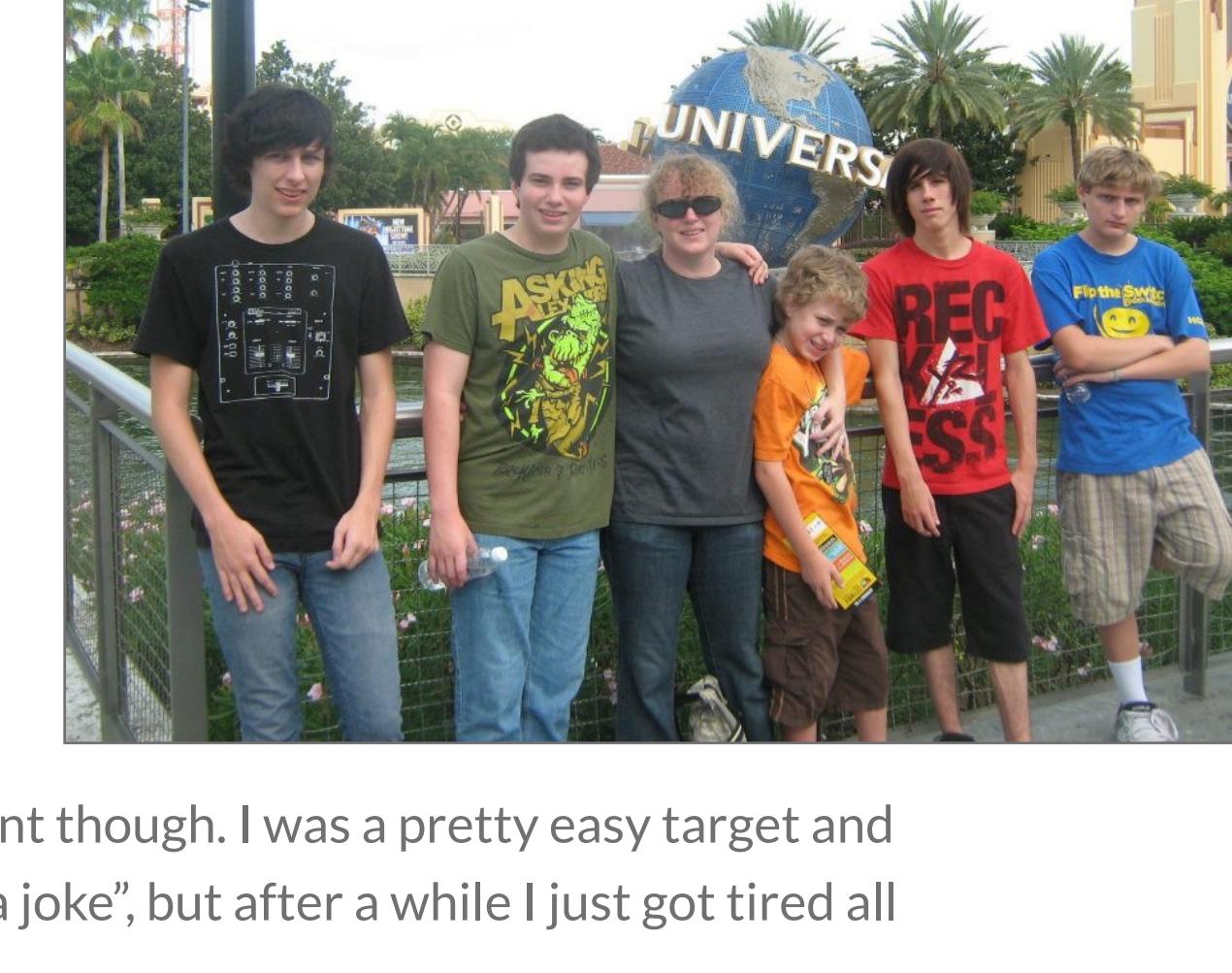
We all met back up and watched the Shrek 4D experiences before we had lunch and went back to our hotel for the day. That night we just sat in our rooms and rested from an eventful past 24 hours. That night I started to really tire of Chris. He had been living with us for a few months and in that span of time his charm started wearing off for me. I began to notice a lot of things that seemed to come to a head during this vacation. His jokes were often at other peoples expense. They were clever but often mean spirited. He targeted everyone at one point or another including Trent and myself. It seemed like it happened to me more than Trent though. I was a pretty easy target and was too shy and insecure to defend myself most times. Even when I did defend myself, he acted like I was no fun because "it's just a joke", but after a while I just got tired all these jokes at mine or other's expense.



The next day we spent completely at Universal. My mom and I rode "Revenge of the Mummy" a few more times, and took Paul to Dr. Seus area. No other than us three had interest in it because it was really meant for the small kids, but I grew up with Seus and still felt too scared to ride the big rides. Despite the teasing I got for being a 15 year-old who's scared of most of the rides, I just couldn't seem to get past the fear. Still I could have fun with my mom and little brother at the Dr. Seus park, the E.T. ride, and the Looney Tunes park.

We all met back up and had lunch. After we finished up with lunch, we moved on to the second part of the park; Adventure Island. Adventure Island was the side of the park that had all the rides based off Marvel superheroes, The Simpsons, etc.

We passed by The Incredible Hulk Coaster and everyone expressed interest in riding. This included my mom and little brother. My excuses were gone and I was the odd man out. We decided to go on the Spiderman ride first though. It was during the wait for that ride that I decided that it was time to face my fears. After the conclusion of Spiderman, we went to line up for the Hulk coaster. My stomach sat on my Adam's apple as we inched closer and closer to the front of line. Eventually we were getting into seats and being strapped down. I was so tempted to get off and wait for everyone by the cubbies for purses and sunglasses. The embarrassment I would feel doing that made me just as anxious too, so toughing it out was my only option. I'm really glad I did it! After that ride I felt confident. I felt the world open up to me. From that point on, I rode every ride I could. I was a new man.



About Universal

According to their site:



"It's just like watching your favorite TV shows and movies IRL, except with the ultimate ride-y things like twists, turns and drops. Face villains more menacing than your kids pre-churros. Save the earth daily or even hourly. Oh and dragons, have we got dragons. And one of them even breathes real fire so that's cool (err hot). This is way beyond the movies."

[Visit Official Site](#)

Photos From Universal Studios





SUMMER 2012
JOURNEY



[Home](#)

[Universal Studios](#)

[Sea World](#)

[Busch Gardens](#)

[Journey's End](#)

Sea World

The day after that we explored Sea World which was luckily right across the street from our hotel. I was really excited about seeing all the ocean creatures and ,with my new found interests in more rides, I was excited for for all the roller coasters.

I had a great time see all the exhibits and petting the manta rays. The rides were fantastic! My favorite was the Manta Ray ride! I really felt like I was just flying over around the park. After riding a few rides we checked to seen the whale show schedule. We had about two and a half hours to spare before the show began so we went and ate lunch.

I don't remember why or what was said, but I remember Chris saying something at lunch that just really made me upset and caused a further distance in the rift of our friendship. I remember really regretting him living with us and felt trapped. I questioned what type of person he was and whether or not I wanted to be his friend anymore.

Anyone who's lived in Arkansas knows that the climate in the state can be pretty abhorrent. I'm not sure how Florida's climate is year round, but in the July of 2012 the differences in the two state dried out my nasal cavity pretty bad. This is not a rare occurrence for me. Usually the changing of seasons causes it to dry up, and my mom's nasal cavities apparently are very similar so I suspect that the source.

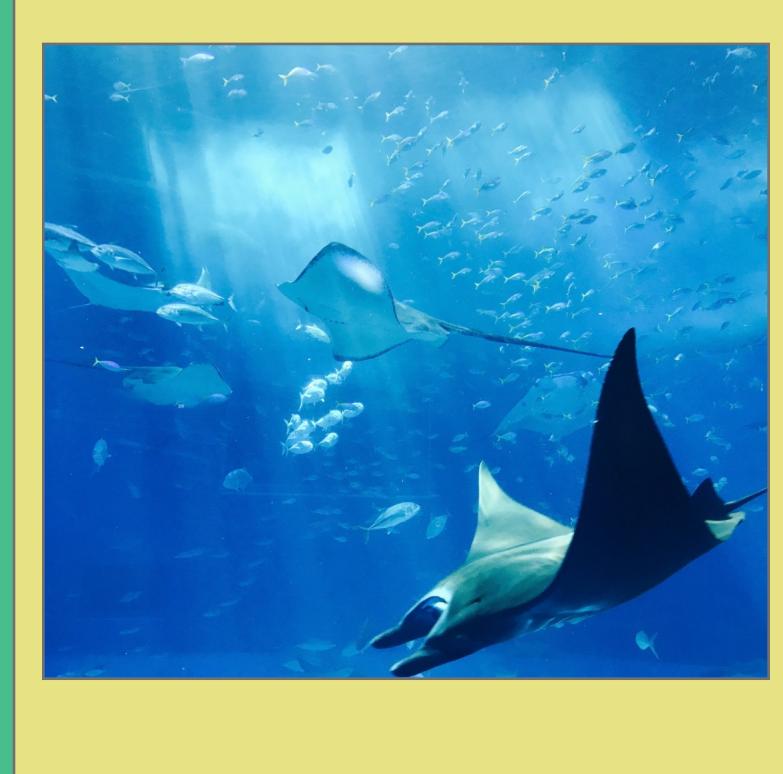
During this trip I didn't realize just how bad I was dried out, and as I sat in the bleachers excited to see the Orcas and eating my popcorn...something bad happened. I sneeze crept up on me and when I realized I was about to sneeze I quickly tried to cover my nose and mouth with my hand. I finally sneezed and pulled my hand away. When I pulled my hand away from my face, my eyes look to see blood all over my hands and shirt. I looked like I had been in a bar brawl. At that point I realized a deep warmth that began running out of my nose and down my top lip. My mom turned and saw the scene and helped me go to the bath room so I could try cleaning up.

I felt so embarrassed every time I caught someones eye-line as we walked to the auditorium restroom. I ran into the bath room and stood at the sink just trying to clean myself up and get my nose to clot, but it just kept going and going and going. Eventually I realized I had been in the bathroom for a long time and got tired of feeling embarrassed as people washing their hands next to me wouldn't stop staring.

So I conceded to my bloody nose's will, and my and I walked back to our hotel to take care of my nose. Ironically, when we finally made it back, the blood decided to stop running. I was very sad I missed the show, but what could I do in that situation?



About Sea World

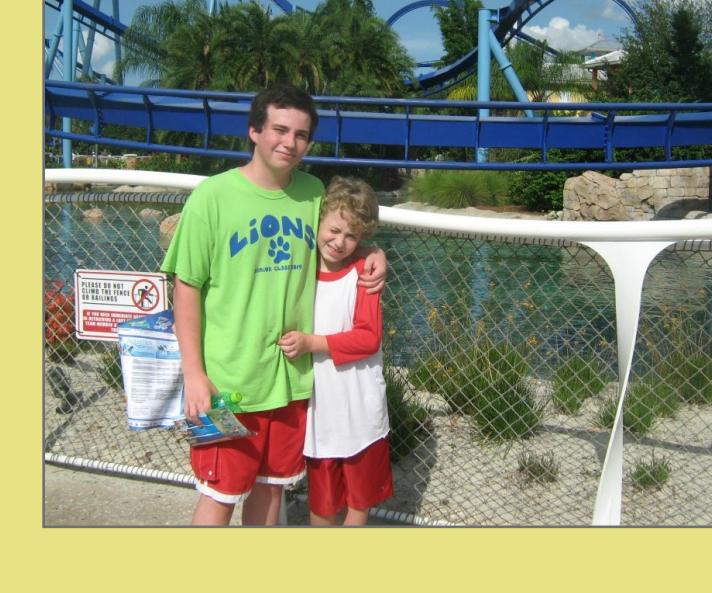
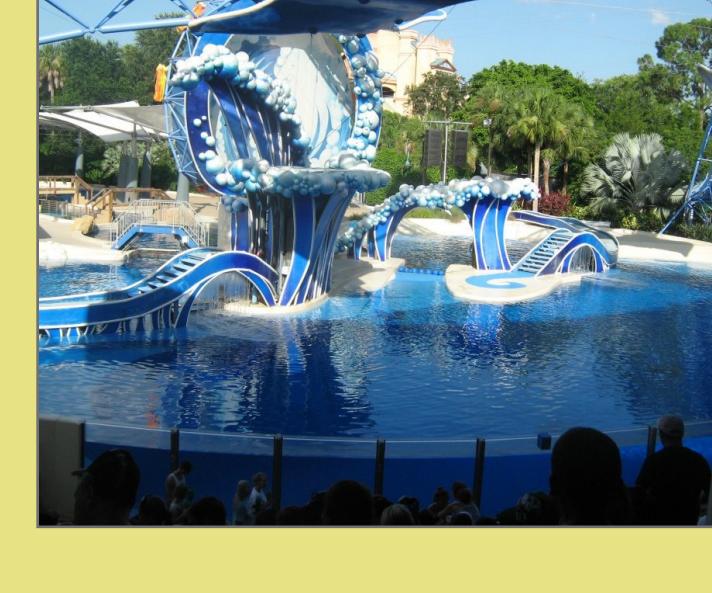


I would like to note that I think SeaWorld's actions and practices in the past are very questionable, and ,though my innocent 15 year-old self had marvelous time seeing all the creatures, the animals and rest of the ocean life's safety and health is the most important. I personally don't think human's entertainment should come before any harm or malnutrition.

The official site is linked but look into how they go about treating the animals before purchasing your tickets. It's a fun place, but we should hold these places accountable whenever the animals safety comes into question.

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Photos From Sea World





SUMMER 2012
JOURNEY



[Home](#)

[Universal Studios](#)

[Sea World](#)

[Busch Gardens](#)

[Journey's End](#)

Busch Gardens



The day after was our last day in Orlando. I had a great time despite the toxicity I felt in my friendship with Chris. We packed and hit the road because our third and final part wasn't actually in Orlando. It was a decent drive in Tampa.

On our way to Busch, my mom expressed her disappointment of not being able to show us the ocean on the trip because it was too far out of our way and the rental van was due back the next day. I was disappointed but understood the situation, and to be honest I didn't want to stay in the van driving any longer than I had to.

I was very resentful to Chris because I realized he was a good friend and so I tried avoid him. I did it both as a desire to try and enjoy the rest of the trip with him ruining it, and also because I didn't want to deal with any drama (especially with a 15 hour drive ahead of us).

Busch had the best rides out of all the parks in my opinion. Universal and SeaWorld had stronger points than Busch in other aspects, but Busch Gardens' was second to none. How I would describe the park is if you took a zoo and filled it with roller coasters, and the roller coaster were fantastic! The designs of the rides and how fast some of them went made for a thrilling visit

to the park. The wildlife they kept there was also great to look at in-between rides. In fact, for some of the lines for the rides, they had the habitats for certain animals in a spot where people could watch the animals while they waited to get on the ride.

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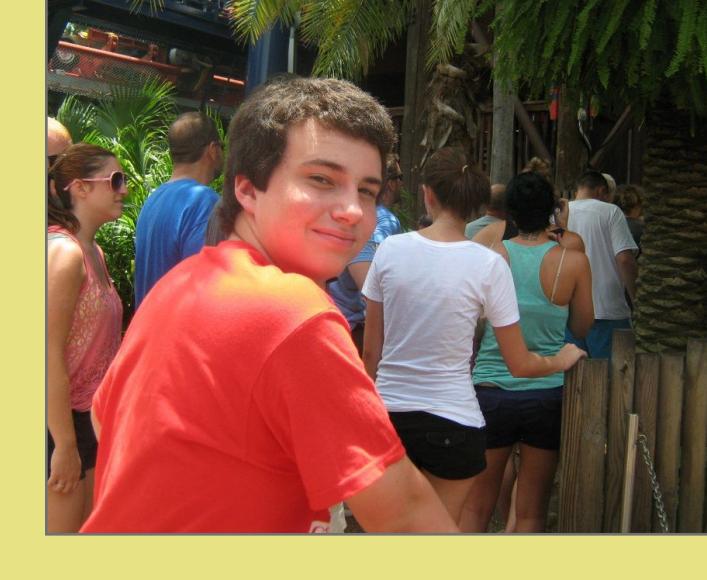
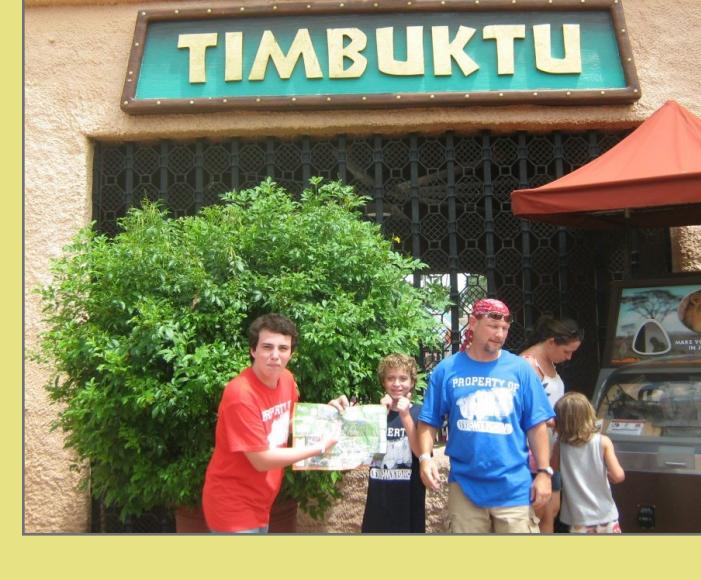
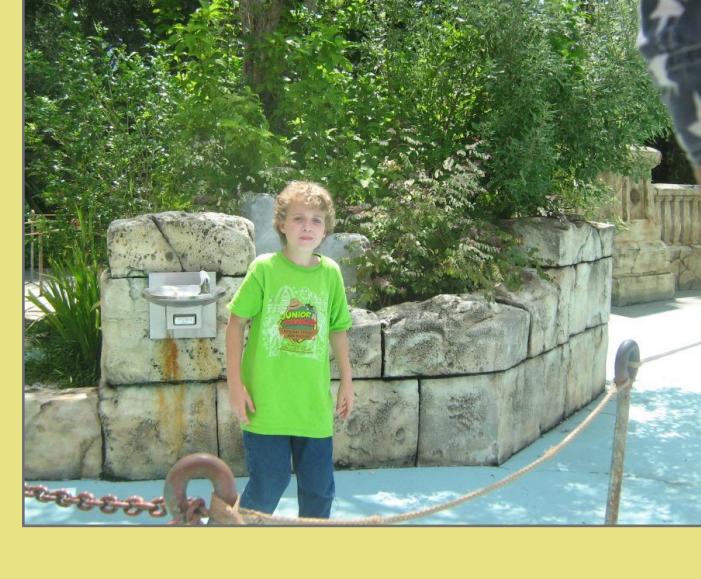
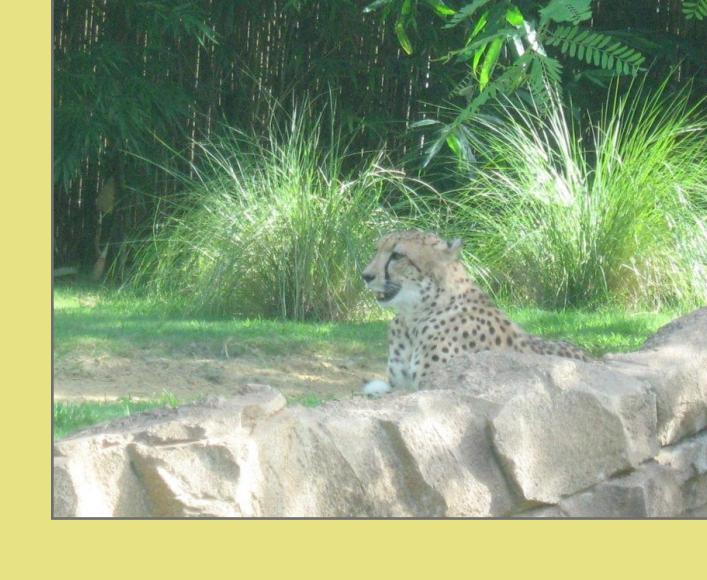
According to their Wikipedia:



"Busch Gardens is the name of two amusement parks in the United States, owned and operated by SeaWorld Entertainment. The original park is in Tampa, Florida, and the second park is in Williamsburg, Virginia. There were also previously Busch Gardens parks in Van Nuys, Los Angeles, California and Houston, Texas."

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Photos From Busch Gardens





SUMMER 2012 JOURNEY



[Home](#)

[Universal Studios](#)

[Sea World](#)

[Busch Gardens](#)

[Journey's End](#)

Journey's End

We took the long drive home and I retreated into myself. I needed to decompress and listen to music after an eventful four days. I wouldn't say that I had a life changing experience with this trip, but I certainly grew a substantial amount.

During that trip I realized that someone I looked up to was actually a pretty bad friend and a bully at times. I also took a big step and let go of my fear. It was very freeing to be able to let go and experience all I could at the parks by facing the fear of roller coasters and other rides that went so high up.

I had a good time in Orlando, Florida and I hope to go back one day!!

About Orlando

According to their VisitOrlando.com:



"Whether you're a Florida resident or otherwise ready to travel, it's time to head off to Orlando for the best staycation ever! Enjoy open-air adventures at our theme parks, unforgettable ecotourism experiences, and outdoor fun the whole family can enjoy together – including al fresco dining and shopping, expansive resorts with incredible pools and recreational activities, and much more! You can also visit with confidence, knowing that our theme parks, attractions, hotels and other businesses are working closely with medical experts to ensure a healthy travel experience. Find special offers from our partners,

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