



MindStormPhoto  
Florida 2014

Burt and Evelyn Johnson

# Florida 2014

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# Tornado!

## Tornado!



We flew from Cuenca to Quito, then on to Miami today. We are here to handle some legal issues that required being in the States (more details on that next week). When arriving, our first stop was a local Citibank branch, to handle closing out an obsolete account.

While there, the wind whipped into a frenzy. The sky turned nighttime dark. The clouds opened up into a massive torrent that flooded the streets in a matter of minutes. I made some flippant comment to the bank manager, and she said "there is an active tornado watch." I laughed and made another flippant comment, upon which point she assured me that she was telling the truth, and that I should really get out of town for a few hours.

# Tornado!

To be honest though, this image above is a news photo from a tornado that hit here last year. No tornado actually materialized today. The watch was lifted an hour later as the storm passed, leaving flooded streets, but not much else. It was exciting for a bit though --- we have lived through a volcano (Mt St Helens in 1979), two major regional fires (Lexington Reservoir in 1985 and Oakland Firestorm in 1992) and a major earthquake (Loma Prieta in 1989). For awhile there, we thought we could add tornado to our resume...



We then checked into our Miami Beach hotel (a 4-star that is really closer to a 3-star at best...), then headed across town to buy some art supplies that Evelyn has wanted, and across town again to an Apple store to buy a new iPad Mini for both of us. Being back in the States for a few days means grab those things you just can't find in Ecuador!

# Bulls Eye

## Bulls Eye



# Bulls Eye

We went this morning to the [Stone Hart shooting range](#) in Miami, and each fired 25 rounds of a Glock 9mm pistol for the first time in our lives. We have watched cop shows and action movies for years, and wondered "is it really that hard to hit something?" We decided to go try it out for ourselves while in Miami.

What you see above is the target after my first 5 rounds. The first hit high -- I almost got the guy in the throat when aiming for the center of mass. The next four were nicely spaced in a group just a tad high though. I was a natural!

Evelyn was next up, and did nearly as good on her first set of five rounds. By the end of our 25 rounds each though, our shots were going a bit wilder -- still in the paper, but definitely not where we were aiming. After we were done, we decided that we could definitely hit a Bad Guy -- as long as he stood stock still and was no further than 20 feet away!

Most of our meals in Miami Beach have been overpriced substandard junk. The one exception was tonight, at [Pied á Terre](#). About two blocks down from our (poor quality) hotel, was the [Cadet Hotel](#), where the West Point cadets made their home during World War II. Entertainment was a pleasant jazz singer, reminiscent of that era, and the food was elegant, well presented, and delicious. Of course, we could eat out for a week in Cuenca for what it cost for that one meal, but then, this *is* Miami Beach...

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, March 8, 2014

[Event](#), [Family](#), [Travel](#)

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# Lock and Load

## Lock and Load



Yesterday we went to a pistol firing range for the first time. Today we upped the ante, and went to a machine gun firing range called [Lock and Load](#)! We started out with nearly an hour of explanation of what the various gun choices were, and then training on how to stand and fire.

# Lock and Load



*These were five of the machine guns we chose to fire*

We each chose four guns to fire. Both of us chose:

1. HK UMP, 40 caliber from Germany
2. FN Herstal SAW, 5.56 X 45 caliber NATO, from USA

Evelyn also fired:

1. HK MP7A1, caliber 4.6 X 30 NATO, from Germany (used by Delta Force)
2. HK 416, caliber 5.56 X 45 NATO from Germany ("the gun that killed Osama")

Burt chose:

1. Thompson ("Tommy") Gun, 45 caliber from USA
2. FN Herstal F2000, 5.56 X 45 caliber NATO from Belgium ("Bull Pup")

# Lock and Load



*Brian gave us training and help during the firing session*

# Lock and Load

Evelyn proved a natural with the big guns. When doing a double-tap, she consistently hit the orange bulls eye on the first bullet, and a bit up to the right (but still well in chest range) on the second shot. Burt tended to hit dead-center bulls eye, but then subsequent shots ran up and the right, hitting any poor bystander a mile behind the target.

# Everglades Airboat

## Everglades Airboat



This afternoon we drove from Miami to Naples, across the Florida Everglades. Along the way, we stopped at [Buffalo Tiger's Everglades Airboat](#) tours. We have seen these airboats periodically on TV and in the movies, and this was our chance to see what they were like to ride. This tour guide had the highest rating on [Trip Advisor](#) for any of the tours, so we chose it out of dozens we saw while driving State Route 41.

# Everglades Airboat



Our guide took us on a 4 mile ride into the Everglades. When he stopped at one spot in the marsh, the water was teeming with birds, some of which landed on our guide's head and outstretched arms.

# Everglades Airboat



A second stopping point found us with several adult crocodiles coming right up to the boat. We soon learned why, as our guide fed one of them a loaf of bread. Note that these photos were all captured with a wide angle lens -- the crocs were only a couple feet from the camera...

, March 9, 2014

[Animals](#), [Event](#), [Travel](#)

# Mommy, Where Do Fireworks Come From?

Mommy, Where Do Fireworks Come From?



We have been eating our way across Southern Florida the last few days, as well as stopping in art stores, office supply stores and others, buying stuff we can't get in Ecuador. Today, we were driving along the Tamiami Trail, heading North out of Naples, and I saw a humongous fireworks store. I had never seen anything bigger than a roadside stand with a few tables before, so was intrigued. Three blocks further and there was yet another ginormous fireworks warehouse store. We *had* to stop and look!

Mommy, Where Do Fireworks Come From?

# Mommy, Where Do Fireworks Come From?

Unfortunately, we were not allowed to photograph any of the actual fireworks. The office manager did relent enough to let us photograph the aisle signs though.

Think of a giant Safeway that sells only fireworks of every possible configuration, and you will start to get a feel of what it was like in there. Where Safeway might have an aisle for 'pasta, sauces, rice', here you had an aisle for 'firecrackers, missiles, roman candles & wing items.'



The store manager was nice enough to talk to us for awhile, even though I made it clear we could not take any with us, lest we be arrested entering Ecuador with explosives. She told us that most of the fireworks were made in China, including their own brand of [Sky King](#) fireworks.

# Mommy, Where Do Fireworks Come From?

I asked if they could ship to California, and was told that they cannot ship anywhere, due to postal and air freight regulations. Everything they sell from this giant store is sold to walk-in customers. Even more amazing, when I checked their website later, I found there were three of these stores between Naples and Sarasota. Florida must celebrate with fireworks as much as Ecuadorians, to keep a store this large in business!

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, March 9, 2014

[Event](#), [Festival](#), [Fireworks](#)

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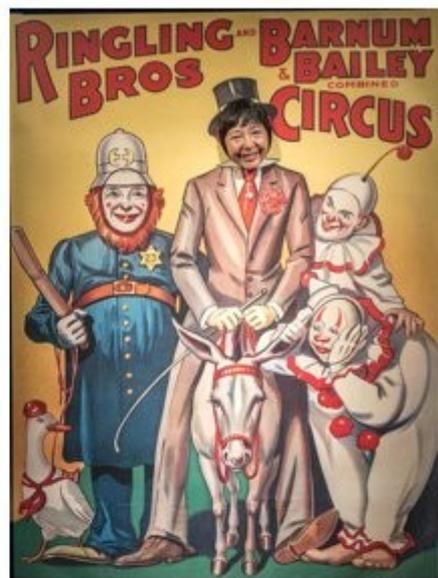
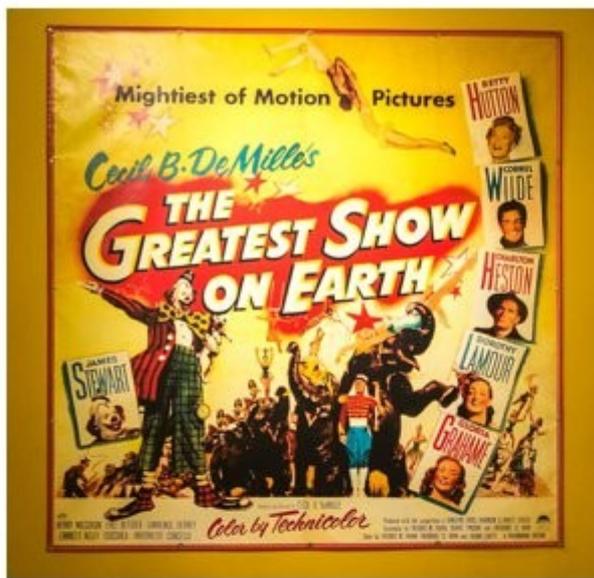
# Ringling Circus Museum

## Ringling Circus Museum



Sarasota, Florida was the home of Ringling Bros Circus, and now presents [the Ringling Bros Art Museum](#). Upon entering, the first thing you see is a massive circus in miniature, covering 3700 square feet, reproducing in astonishing detail an early circus lot. The original circus would typically cover an area of 30 acres, requiring 1000 workers to set up at dawn and then tear down at the end of the day, in time to move the train to the next town that night. Another 500 workers consisted of performers and support crew, including 13 blacksmiths to keep the horses and carts running, more than 20 cooks to feed the crew, etc.

# Ringling Circus Museum



There was also a room dedicated to the movie [The Greatest Show on Earth](#), with a host of great actors, including some (like Jimmy Stewart) that hadn't yet become famous enough to make it on the movie poster. While there, one woman sitting on a bench said to me "I don't understand what these movie stars have to do with the circus." When I explained about the iconic movie from 1952, she replied "Oh, that was before I came to the United States." (It was also long before I was old enough to watch movies, but I have seen it multiple times in the decades since...)

# Ringling Circus Museum

Then there was the original custom train car used by John and Mable Ringling when touring with the circus. About 2/3 of the car was set up for the owner couple, with the remaining 1/3 split between the kitchen and quarters for all the cooks and servants.



*Next up were several rooms with a multiple of often massive Renaissance paintings, typical of any large art museum.*

# Ringling Circus Museum



*Outside was a playground being enjoyed by several families. We were curious why the kids were not in school on a Monday, but never asked, so have no answer.*

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, March 11, 2014

[Animals, Travel](#)

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# Hit By Dragon Snot

## Hit By Dragon Snot



*Entering Hogsmead felt like Harry first showing up in town, not sure where to turn*

We are both fans of the Harry Potter books and movies, so when coming to Florida, we had to stop by and see the new Harry Potter World. We bought a two day pass to let us go to Adventure World (where Harry resides) and Universal Studios.

# Hit By Dragon Snot



Our first stop was the Harry Potter ride. The route to the ride itself went past the Sorting Hat, a hologram of Dumbledore, then another hologram of the three friends (Harry, Ron & Hermione) warning of a dreaded history teacher. The ride itself is a pretty darn good inside roller coaster that doesn't really roller or coaster... ([see here for how it works](#), though you can't really see it when on the ride). On the ride, you pass by the expected animatronic monsters, one of which (the dragon) sneezes and you are covered with Dragon Snot! (OK, water vapor, but it came from a dragon!)

# Hit By Dragon Snot



When the ride was over, we treated ourselves to a Butter Beer -- kind of like root beer but with more of a buttery flavor. Definitely something I would have liked as a kid.

We continued onto a few other rides, including Spiderman 3D (above bottom shows what a 3D image looks like when photographed with a normal camera...). Our last attraction of the day was Sinbad -- a throwback to a 1970's bad-acting stunt show that was a full blown dud. We decided to put a better end to the day by going back to the Harry Potter ride again!

# Hit By Dragon Snot



We came back today to check out Universal Studios. Unfortunately, that was one dud after another. We started with Twister, and left wondering when the show was going to start? Then The Mummy turned out to be a very short inside roller coaster (maybe 2 minutes or so) with cartoonish wanna-be-scary animatronics.

Men In Black was a boring short ride with seats that turned ala the 1960's Teakettle rides.

Terminator 2 3D was the only almost-decent show of the day. It was a cartoonish combination of live actors and a decent 3D extension of the original movie (Swartzenager and Conner go into the future.

# Hit By Dragon Snot

After the theme park, we decided to go to the AMC IMAX 3D viewing of *300 Rise of Empire*. To be honest, I didn't expect a great movie, but there aren't any IMAX theaters in Ecuador, so this was a last chance to see a Big Screen show for awhile.

Lots of blood and gore, all in 3D, but otherwise a movie that will be easy to forget...

Basically, if anyone else wants to come here, our recommendation is to spend a few hours in Adventure Land, but skip Universal Studios entirely, unless you have very young children along that are easily entertained...

# Lift Off!

## Lift Off!



Like many kids, I was enthralled with space exploration. I remember going outside at night to watch Sputnik go overhead in 1957. I saved extra copies of the newspaper when I was a paper-boy the day John Glen went around the earth in a Mercury capsule in 1961. And I actually helped design the [mirror that the Apollo 11 left on the moon in 1969](#).

With all that background, there was no way I was going to miss seeing the Kennedy Space Center while driving through Florida. Our expectations were rather low though, from theme parks in general, and from Universal Studios in particular. As such, we rolled into KSC about 1:00, expecting to spend a couple hours and be on our way.

Our only disappointment was that we had not arranged more time. When the 5:00 closing time rolled around, we had only been through a little more than half the display area, but had not been able to take the tour to see the first moon landing display (which probably has a replica of the mirror I worked on). If you come, be prepared to spend a full day -- at least if you enjoy space anywhere near as much as I do.

# Lift Off!

There were two IMAX 3D shows -- one on Hubble and one on the Space Station. Both were excellent, though the latter was a bit dated as it was filmed before the station was completed. Both of us were amazed that the camera crew was able to get the rather cumbersome IMAX cameras into some of the tight spaces they were filming from.

The space shuttle Endeavor flew close by our house in September 2012, enroute to the Los Angeles museum. Here, we were able to see the shuttle Atlantis up close and personal, as this is the new home for that retired ship.



*Top was the shuttle Endeavor flying past our Berkeley house in 2012. Below is the shuttle Atlantis on display at the Kennedy Space Center.*