

Harriet Report #8 – They Don't Know About Divorce, But I Do

LONDON WITH PETER AND ARTHUR

I went to London in England with my sons Peter (9) and Arthur (6) for five jam packed days of science and nature and mummies and dinosaurs and war museums, and chips, and fish, and cream tea, and pints, and squash. The only thing I regret is that I didn't eat any indian food, but that would have been problematic with the boys.

It was late October and cool but not unpleasant. The taxis were easy, the underground a breeze. The bullet train getting there was ok except for the long delay INSIDE the Chunnel, pitch black and nerve racking to Mommy but the boys didn't mind because they didn't notice. Gameboy is a magic travel tool.

Arthur and Peter fought rarely and looked to me for guidance, a nice change and possibly attributable to being overwhelmed by a very major international city.

One defining element was that it was also school holiday in London and the museums were packed. The only time I thought I'd pass out from claustrophobia was in the five story toy store called Hamley's. We made a pilgrimage there the very first thing upon arriving in London after dropping the one suitcase we had at our B & B near Paddington Station. Hamley's was sickeningly packed with kids and parents and bulky coats and wet umbrellas and no room among the displays for a large mother like me to pass. I really did not regret saying yes to only the second toy they wanted and buying it and getting out of there. Arthur got a segmented interchangeable futuristic machine gun set and Peter got two futuristic guns that can play laser tag. I got peace, out on the sidewalk with the rush hour commute walkers, spacious by comparison.

We hiked back to Fortnum and Mason for my long awaited high cream tea where I pigged out totally. Many thanks to the kind waitress who cooed, oooed, and caked my macho nonbeliever boys into happy high tea appreciation. She ignored their shoes on the plush velvet seat cushions, dripping rain coats dropped on the fancy carpet, and grubby hands on the pristine white linen tablecloth. A human behind a cake can really create some peace.

Later, we finished the evening at Sega World in the Trocodero. I was seriously committed to getting the nastiest mom stuff and pleasantest kid stuff out of the way immediately. I let them each have ten pounds of electronic arcading in exchange for rapid retreat when the allocated funds were finished. Luckily it's an expensive place and we were out of there in about 27 minutes. It was grubby, pounding, blinking, glowing, noisy, and awful, but I survived. The boys loved it.

The rest of the week was home free as far as I figured. Toy negotiations, arcade battles, dragging boys to fancy tea, all checked neatly off my planning list. And what happy memories I have now!

Those guns they bought at Hamley's turned out to be extremely handy. No, we weren't mugged or invaded by aliens, but each day when we came home to bed around 7pm, the boys could spend happy hours playing laser tag and whatever war thing across my happily reclining body on the bed as I obliviously read my book. I didn't get blasted for real even once.

Ok, so we went to London for an educational vacation. It was a breeze to spend the next three and a half days at museums the boys could enjoy. I had a great time, they had a great time, they're just old enough that I don't even have to keep them in sight every second. I know they're just over there SOME where. I'm not embarrassed to walk around yelling "Arthur!" until I get a response. And of course, they both returned home with me at the end of the trip, so I didn't lose them.

We saw everything. We did the war museum and went into the trench experience and the blitz experience, both complete with smells and shaking floor. We saw dinosaurs, stuffed animals including a bunch of really cool extinct stuff, fabulous gems, mummies, greek myths on the sides of vases, star wars costumes and props, space stuff, human thinking and body stuff, bugs, engineering stuff, snakes, and lots more in the each larger than multiple city blocks Natural History, the Science, and the British Museum. Boy if it's such a blur for me, what's it like for them?

Arthur surprised me the week after we got back by singing to himself the lead song from the musical we went to. It was clear when we were there that he liked it because he jumped out of his seat a couple times and once he yelled at the actors, luckily during a really loud scene. But for him to remember and be singing the songs, that was impressive. It was "Starlight Express" by Andrew Lloyd Weber and had only been running twelve YEARS so far! Totally on roller skates, with laser lights, live band, and a moving, three story stage of ramps. Talk about action. Because it was school break week, they didn't have discounted tickets. We could have bought Arthur a really nice new bike instead, but it was worth it! The singing was great. I thought at the time that it seemed pretty dated and elevator music-ish. I hope it's not cheating that I really loved it in hindsight?

My very favorite thing from the whole London vacation (not cream tea but that's close) was the three dimensional IMAX we went to. It was animated and called "Cyber World" and I know, I know it sounds silly, but it was absolutely fabulous. Like seeing "Fantasia" or "Koyanaskatsi" by Phillip Glass. Very memorable.

Let's see, I haven't reported much about food. Sure, you guessed it! There wasn't much memorable about it. We ate all our big meals in the museum restaurants at lunch. Then we had fast food or pub food for dinner on the walk home between the underground and our B&B. Then some gun play in our hotel room, a little TV. We watched "Who wants to be a millionaire" (brittish version) two nights in a row, my first time ever seeing it, and it was fun to pick it apart. And lots of refreshing sleep. Our room was on the back side and we could open the window, it wasn't too cold, and have a really nice sleep, about nine or ten hours each night. It was easy to wake up without an alarm and be dressed and ready for 8am breakfast.

Ah, breakfast! It was a treat. I loved the china first of all, lots of it chipped, but that great blue and white stuff that can be really cheap or really expensive. The tea was wonderful, the boys ate their scrambled eggs, I ate bacon and fried eggs, and we all pigged out on toast, irish butter and jam. That was the best part. Every morning we asked for more toast just so we could eat the butter and preserves. There was cereal and juice too. And Peter seemed to like having hot chocolate in his own tea pot. Actually, we were all amazed at the amount of china we each got. There was a toast plate, a cereal bowl, a tea pot, a tea cup and saucer, a butter plate, a jam bowl, a big egg and bacon plate, and two knives, a big spoon, a little spoon, a fork. There was barely room on the table!

Did we ever go outside? Of course! We spent a little time in the park each day. Just enough to exercise Arthur, but only if there was a bench for Mommy. We also did some walking and a couple more shopping pilgrimages, one to the TinTin store and one to the children's book center. I insisted we take a double decker bus tour so they would at least pass by all the famous sights, but the tour guide was past listless to useless so we had to rely on the knowledgeable 12 year old sitting behind us to tell us what we were passing. Every trip has to have some disappointments. The 12 year old was quite nice.

We did run out of time, but it's a good sign that the museums were so interesting to all of us, especially the boys who set the pace. So we missed these low priority spots, extensive research was done you see; the Transport Museum, the Victoria and Albert, the Zoo, the Tower of London, Harrods, and the Clink Prison Museum. Maybe when they're older?

What else is there to tell you? There weren't any major meltdowns except Mommy at Hamley's and there were no injuries except to the bank account. We came home happy and full and still loving each other, and as I recall, spent the following weekend before school resumed, laying around and watching videos, which is the same as resting.

From the distance of one month since the trip, I want to emphasize my extreme contentment with spending time with my boys enjoying the overwhelming bounty

of London's museums and culture, and especially how sweet it was to have that special time with them.

Amen. I mean, the end.
November 17, 2000