

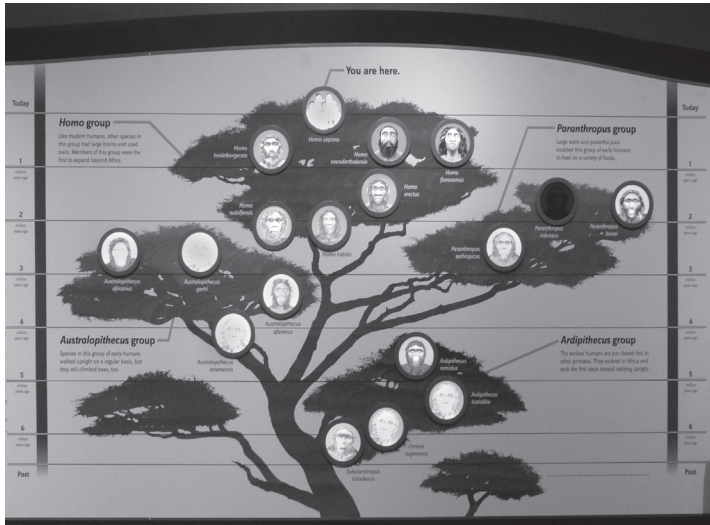
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Last fall, my family and I went to Washington, DC to see the **David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins** at the National Museum of Natural History. My initial thoughts were that it was going to be yet another exhibition with specimens and loads of text, but I was greatly surprised to find that the exhibit team had combined interactives with large touchable sculptures, specimens, and interviews with scientists. It provided our family (two adults, a 7-year-old, and a 15-year-old) with a variety of experiences—there was something for everyone.

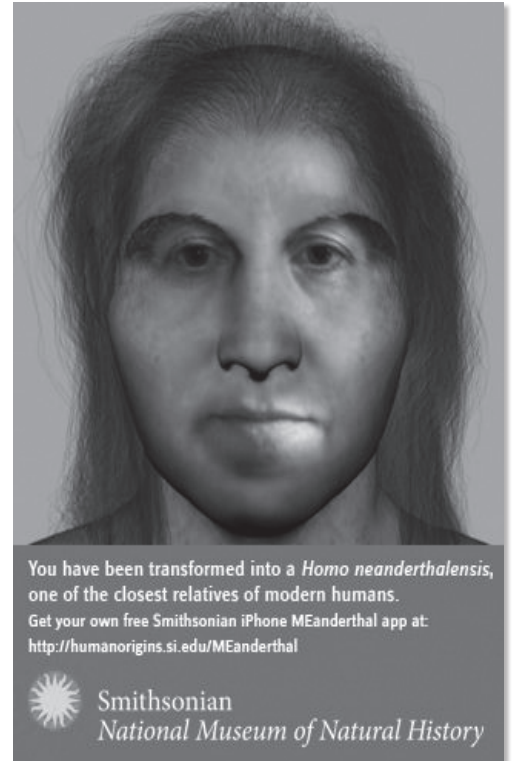


Lifesize bronze sculptures are beautifully executed. Here, two young visitors get up close to one of five different early human species that lived between 2.3 million and 17,000 years ago, and that are now extinct. **Hall of Human Origins**, NMNH. Courtesy of Beth Redmond-Jones.



"Where are you on the human family tree?" allows visitors to see the connection between us, *Homo sapiens*, and our ancestors. **Hall of Human Origins**, NMNH. Courtesy of Beth Redmond-Jones.

The exhibition explores 6 million years of scientific evidence about human origins and the stories of survival and extinction in our family tree during times of dramatic climate instability. The exhibition content is based on research by Smithsonian scientists and that of other researchers from around the world. The exhibition design was open, and the exhibit cases with specimens were beautiful. The touchable cast reproductions of real skulls were a highlight for my kids—they loved being able to compare one to another, and to touch. The "Snapshots of Survival" components were the least engaging aspect for me because they



Using the MEanderthal mobile app, Beth Redmond-Jones has been morphed into *Homo neanderthalensis*. Courtesy of Beth Redmond-Jones.

were designed as small enclosed areas, and on a crowded day, I didn't want to worm my way through the crowd to see what they were all about.

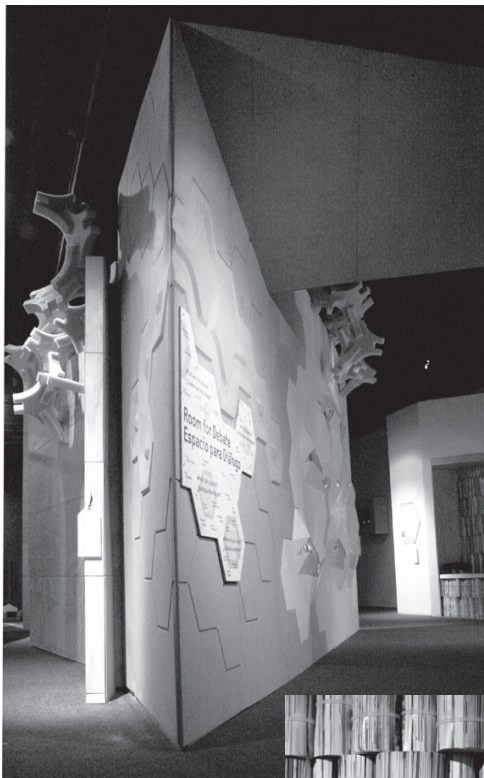
The one element that our family took away from that exhibition and that we still engage with today is the MEanderthal mobile app; it allows you take a photo of yourself, then morph your image back in time into the face of an early human.

Paul Orselli sent this description of a recent museum visit. **Project Mah Jongg** is a sweet temporary exhibition that I recently enjoyed seeing (and playing with and hearing!) at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in lower Manhattan. Mah Jongg is a Chinese-based game played with thick tiles inscribed with symbols. It was introduced into the U.S. in the 1920s and quickly became a popular game especially among Jewish women, and fostered a sense of community for those women in the post-war United States.

Despite being in a relatively small gallery, the bright and colorful exhibition design by Abbott Miller of Pentagram (including giant-sized Mah Jongg tiles that form physical dividers for the different thematic sections of the show and game tables set up that you could play with) really drew me in, and provided a bit of a mental respite from the more somber subject matter of the rest of the museum's exhibitions.

Also, sound units that were visitor controllable (which thankfully meant they could be switched off if you didn't want to hear any more) around the perimeter wall provided snippets of sound to provide not only historical context, but short vignettes of Mah Jongg games in progress.

Many of the artifacts, including different types of Mah Jongg sets, were loaned for the exhibition by museum staff and volunteers from treasured family keepsakes, highlighting the importance of community and memory that Mah Jongg still fosters.



Room for Debate, Miami Science Museum Courtesy of Sean Duran.



Close-up of exhibit wall made from rolled magazines, **Room for Debate**, Miami Science Museum. Courtesy of Sean Duran.

Sean Duran sent this in about a new exhibition that just opened at the Miami Science Museum. **Room for Debate** is aimed at promoting discussion around visitors' lifestyle choices and the resulting environmental impact. Interactives in this room include a Snibbe infotiles wall, a feedback video kiosk by Brad Larson, a pair of carbon calculators, and other elements. The entire space was made from found materials (like magazines that were rolled and stacked to form a wall, and repurposed cremation tubes that were lined up to form another) in addition to green materials (like wheat board, sustainably harvested woods, and recycled plastics). All of the materials were tagged with hanging labels so visitors could compare the merits or challenges of the different substances. Graphics were printed with soy inks directly on hunks of old shipping crates that had arrived at the museum for one reason or another. ✨