

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

There are only two ways we can get water into the RV. We either fill up our 30-gallon water tank or we connect to a water source, basically a garden hose plugged into the side of the RV. There were problems with both of these options when we were traveling in below freezing weather a few days this month. First, we couldn't fill the tank, it would most likely freeze, or the waterlines would. Second, we found many of the campgrounds turn off the water at the camp sites for the same reason.

So we were stuck. Well, we at least had to make some adjustments. We filled jugs of water where we could and showered at the campground showers instead of our own. Once I went to a water pump to fill a pot of water and then heated it up on the stove to do dishes. I felt like I'd traveled back in time.

By the time we got to Oklahoma, it was warm enough to fill our tank. But once we did, we had new problems to deal with. One of the faucets had cracked, probably due to frozen water. It sprayed water all over the food in a cabinet below. We also learned that every time we turned the water on, the bathroom floor got wet – a broken waterline. These frustrating repairs were really piling up. Then one rainy morning in Arkansas about 6 a.m. I woke up to water splashing me in the face. The seal on the roof vent above me had cracked in the cold. There was a little puddle of water on the quilt I was curled up under. Water can be so damaging.

We got a haunting reminder of that fact while crossing over into Louisiana. While driving along the highway, I thought we were approaching a RV sales or storage lot. As we got closer, I looked at the lot, seeing thousands of plain white trailers. The rows went on as far as I could see. The more we drove, the more we saw. Sadness poured over me as I stared wide-eyed at the sea of trailers. I looked over to Dan in the driver's seat. We both knew even before we saw the big FEMA sign on the chain linked fence, that these were the remnants of the relief effort after Hurricane Katrina, nearly five years ago.

We wondered what was being done with the trailers. We talked about the people who'd lived in them and thought about their lives now. Our own simple water problems amounted to nothing compared to this. With a few supplies from Lowe's and Camping World, our issues can be solved. It can take years to recover from a hurricane.

The weird thing about water is that while it's so destructive and potentially dangerous, it's also something we need. We protect and conserve it like there's not enough to go around. These contrasting ideas became clear to me this week in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Here's a place that embodies the idea that water is not just a necessity, it's a luxury. Even the name of the town conjures up warmth and comfort. Before we got there I knew nothing more than the fact that the town has been very popular for its healing thermal waters. What I found out was that this place, nestled alongside the Ouachita Mountains, has attracted Indians, soldiers, gangsters and tourists for centuries.

The springs really do bubble up out of the ground, and they are hot. Little tufts of steam rise up out of the ground. There are waterfalls and fountains, all hot water, all around town. At a jug fountain, where

people come to fill up on spring water, we learned from a national park ranger that there are 47 hot springs, some are protected, some run right under the row of bathhouses and are piped into the buildings. At the visitor's center we toured an old bathhouse and learned that the waters were once believed to heal people.

I wanted to try out the healing waters for myself. There are several bathhouses, but only one, the Buckstaff, gives travelers a traditional bath. Dan encouraged me to buy a bath, so I accepted. For \$27 I got to experience the longstanding Hot Springs ritual. The bath, the steam cabinet, the hot towels and needle shower were all new to me. By the end I was completely relaxed. And I was really appreciating what water could do. After all the trouble with leaks and the concern over the hurricane trailers, it was nice to get in touch with the healing power of water.

This week water was the struggle, next week it might be time or money. Hopefully, I'll remember with everything there's balance. Knowing that might get me to the completely relaxed stage much sooner.

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