

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

When taking a picture of Carter, I have to be quick. He's five and fast. Abby will often indulge me, posing with a gigantic statue of a bison or sitting still while I get just the right angle or lighting. In Rapid City South Dakota, we walked the City of Presidents, featuring life size bronze statues of the American leaders throughout town. As Abby sat on Abe Lincoln's lap, I grabbed for my cell phone to get a picture. She can sense it when I'm setting up a shot. Carter can too, but he just runs. I think he appears as a blur in that Lincoln photo.

Being a tourist for a year, I can't count the number of family pictures I've taken. It's probably in the thousands. Most are of my own family. I approach other families and couples too. I imagine they are like me. They like to have everybody in the picture once in a while. I remember one young couple in Charleston, South Carolina. They were dressed up, like they'd just come from church. They were so pleased I offered to take a picture of them with their brand new baby girl by a fountain in Waterfront Park. Maybe it was her baptism. It could have been just an afternoon in the park. I'll never know. Then at Yosemite National Park on a deck by the Lower Falls, I offered to take a photo of another family. I quickly realized we didn't speak the same language. It's a good thing there's a universal hand motion for "Would you like me to take your picture?" I motioned and they accepted. They thanked me with a slight bow and a big smile.

More recently, there were two men at Mount Rushmore, a father and son. As I watched them reaching the camera out in front of them, trying to get the presidential heads in the background of their own faces, I was compelled to help out. When I walked away after taking the shot, I overheard the father, who was probably 70, say, "I can't believe we're here together!" They are like me too. I feel that way with my kids all the time.

Even this very moment as I sit in Jamestown, North Dakota writing my column in a Perkins Restaurant, there's a group of six men and women nearby. As they get up to leave they start taking pictures. I hear one woman say, "Okay, all the guys together now." Again, I'm glad to take the group photo. I get instructions on how to use someone's smart phone and they're delighted.

Sometimes I imagine all those family photos displayed in albums, scrapbooks and on office desks across the country. Not only do they're pictures document that "Yes, we were there, all together," but the pictures also propel my anonymous friends back to a special time. And I, the photographer for the moment, am faceless and at the same time, priceless. I like that feeling of blind service.

Often the people I photograph offer to return the favor. So now we have shots of the whole family in almost every state. Even Carter pauses for a family shot. Our moments are captured, in a split second when the shutter opens and closes. That's how fast my children are growing, in a flash. It's how fast this year of travel has gone too.

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