

## Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

I was sitting on a park bench in Grand Forks, ND when I knew our trip was over. We came into the state on the southwest and spent a week touring our way east. We camped in the North Dakota Badlands; we saw three white bison at the National Buffalo Museum in Jamestown and snapped photos of a pink sunset on the water at Devil's Lake. When we got to Grand Forks, we were as far east as we could get in North Dakota. Dan and I sat on the bench watching the kids swing. I couldn't think of anything to talk about or to do. We'd explored 48 states. The year was up, the money was spent. The only thing left to do was drive home. It was Thursday and we were 16 hours from home. I was in limbo, not wanting it to be over. I searched my mind for something to get us through the miles ahead of us. The welcoming of family and friends came to mind first. Over the last couple weeks we've received encouraging emails and text messages and phone calls. We knew there were people waiting for our arrival. My parents and brothers called to ask us when to expect us. Neighbors emailed saying they're on the lookout for signs of life at our house. I so appreciated their excitement. I missed them too. But deep down there was still this pull to drive west instead, to keep going, to see more. It was a tug of war in my mind as I sat on the bench.

Family wins every time. I remembered talking to my brother Joe on the phone. He was planning to take his kids to Kings Island on Monday. Suddenly, I wanted to be there in Ohio with him, finish the trip with family, in our home state. It'd be one big "exclamation point," as my friend Tim called it, to the whole year.

So for three days, we drove. On Friday it was the Dakotas. On Saturday we drove across Iowa. By Sunday night we had passed through Illinois, Indiana and into Ohio. On Monday we spent 12 hours at Kings Island.

From the Red Racer and kiddie rides to the tide pool in the waterpark, my favorite ride of the day was the waterslide Abby and Carter refused to go on at first. "No, it's too big," and "I'm scared," and "No way!" But we assured them we'd be in the same raft. I told Carter he could sit on my lap. It would be fun, we said, and it's perfectly safe. Abby and Carter reluctantly agreed and we climbed the zigzag stairway to the top of the waterslide. I think this ride was my favorite because as the girl launched our raft down the giant twisting slide, we swished up and down, we held each other and screamed and we all laughed as we splashed into the pool at the bottom. Like the ride of a lifetime we were all safe and together and having fun in the end.

"Let's do it again!" the kids yelled. And the kid in me wanted to do it again too.

As we came to the end of our wonderful trip this week, I have so many people to thank. To all those who supported us, sent money, watched our house, emailed and followed our trip online or in the

newspaper, we were so happy to have you along. It meant a lot to us to know there were people all over the world caring, praying and hoping for our success and safety.

And for all those who've asked, or wondered, "What now?" I can only say we'll keep living the dreams that we now know are possible.

Dan has a hundred ideas but first he plans to finish restoring our home, starting with Carter's new bedroom. Dan will also be working with two good friends on a home improvement business.

You can continue to follow my journey as a writer. Fortunately, I get to check another thing off my bucket list. I'm several chapters in to writing a book about my family, our trip.

Just because we were on the road, Abby never quit asking for a dog. With no firm answer from us, she's continuing to campaign at home. She'll be volunteering at the humane society and working on her new business, Delphos Dog Care, starting in August. And Carter, he's hoping to play as much baseball and soccer as he can this summer. He wants to swim and ride his bike and if you ask him, he's always willing to race to the next corner.

I also hope our family keeps traveling because of all the things I've learned this year. I'm now open to so many people, places and ideas.

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at [www.ourtriptakesus.com](http://www.ourtriptakesus.com). Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. You may e-mail Becky at [beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com](mailto:beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com)