

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

The Top Five

When you tell people you're taking a year off to travel the country, you have to expect there will be questions. What I didn't expect was how many. Since Dan and I were basically planning our trip in a bubble, meaning almost no one knew about it for about 18 months before we left, we really didn't know what people would say. We spent several nights talking about it as we planned. Would people be happy for us? Would they think we're crazy? Would they understand? Finally, about six weeks before we left we started telling family, friends and co-workers. It's actually harder than you think to tell someone you love that you won't be able to make it to their wedding, or see their new baby at the end of the summer because we won't be here. It's just as hard as you might expect to leave co-workers who have become friends.

As for the questions people ask when you tell them, "I'm taking a year off to travel with my family," most people arrive at about five key questions. At first, they are in disbelief. (1. Are you serious/crazy?) Then come the technical questions. (2. What about your job? 3. What about school for the kids? 4. Are you selling your house?) And then, I see it in their eyes, they unmistakably latch on to the idea. (5. Cool, where are you headed first?) That's the best part because then I know they understand and they can relate. This is also the point where people start sharing their trips with me. I get a lot of great travel tips and advice on destinations this way.

Packing Up

How do you pack for an entire year on the road? Right after I graduated from Ohio State, I went on one of the last big family vacations with my parents and siblings. We left one day after graduation for a two-week trip that would include a 35-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail, a visit to Washington D.C. and the Outer Banks in North Carolina.

The thing about packing for that trip was the range of items I needed. On the trail I'd be really roughing it, just the essentials. Then in Washington D.C., I'd be a city tourist and in North Carolina I'd need my beach stuff.

Several months of planning went into the AT hike. Maps, routes, supplies, meals were all laid out in detail. But like all the best laid plans, when your feet hit the trail, everything changes. By the time we met up with Mom in a campground two days into the hike, we were tossing all kinds of stuff out of our backpacks. We weren't about to carry one extra pound for the next 15 miles. In D.C. and the Outer Banks the same was true. I really didn't need all the things I brought to fill my "free-time" on vacation. I had everything I needed with me. I had my parents, their stories, my brothers, our experiences and a journal.

A few weeks ago as I was packing up for the year-long trip of America with my husband and children, I was reminded of that family vacation more than 10 years ago. I recalled from experience that we won't need nearly as much as we think, just each other. I packed accordingly and surprisingly some of my storage spaces are still bare.

Day One

I found an old note to myself while I was packing up the house. The entry read: "Today as I write this we have 360 days until Family Year. On June 15, 2009, my family and I will live a dream and be changed forever."

I read that to Dan as we were driving down the highway the first day. He admitted to me that at that time he wasn't sure we could pull it off. Honestly, I wasn't either. Now as I write this, we are parked at a Flying J truck stop for the night, we have done newspaper, radio and television interviews. We have advertisers. These were all part of the big plan. But the best part is I just spent the last 24 hours with my husband and kids and that was the real plan.

On Day One someone said to Dan, "In such close quarters, you're all really going to get to know each other." Dan replied, "I hope so."

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at www.ourtriptakesus.com. Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. Or learn how to partner with the trip as an advertiser. You may email Becky at beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com