

Our Trip Takes Us

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

Digital highway helps us navigate paved highway

Earlier this week I talked to a reporter in Rhode Island about our trip. He was doing a story for the Providence Journal. I don't know if it struck him first or me, but I do know that as we talked about our trip, and as he asked questions, the more we both realized how "digital" this trip is for my family. That idea was reflected in his story about us in the paper and also in my own journal that evening. You can read his story at projo.com. The following is an edited version of my journal entry.

Fifty ago this trip wouldn't even be possible. I know there were people doing it. John Steinbeck was one. (I had read Steinbeck's "Travels with Charley" in 2008 in preparation for my own trip across America and found inspiration in so much of what he wrote about, including, "We find that after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.") I guess what I mean is, a trip like this wouldn't be feasible for my family 50 years ago. Technology is the key. There are so many devices we depend on daily.

The GPS – There's no better way to get around a city we've never visited. We still have to get out the maps and we still have to plan destinations, but turn for turn, that little device hanging from the windshield has saved us so much in gas. It has saved us a few arguments too, I'm guessing. It doesn't always know about construction, or detours or the town art festival that has Main Street shut down for several blocks. But as strange as it might have sounded 50 years ago, those satellites in outer space are giving us signals down here on earth and they can tell us things as precise as, "Turn left in two miles."

The Cell phone – Besides the obvious phone calls to parents, friends and others, Dan and I call each other if we decide to split up while sightseeing. We locate each other. He calls to remind me to get toilet paper at the grocery store. I have that extra layer of security when I'm out jogging in an unknown area. We use the phones to call ahead to campgrounds and visitor centers to get information and reservations before we arrive. The phones are also great for texting. I text my Twitter account almost every day. I also share pictures and videos with others. I have all my email forwarded to one account so I can check it on my phone. I look up attractions while we were driving down the road. All this can be done with the power of the cell phone. Sometimes that strikes me as very science fiction.

The Computer – Like the cell phone, this electronic is a life saver for our trip. Last week we finally broke down and purchased the Verizon Mobile Broadband Plan, because we were spending too much time chasing free Wi-Fi hotspots and not enough time enjoying our trip. Now we have Internet access almost anytime. With the computer we're mostly keeping our website updated and staying connected with

others through Twitter and Facebook. But also we're using Skype, to video phone call family and friends. One of the things Dan and I talked about before leaving was keeping our connections with the people we love. It's true, we miss dinner at Mom's, joking with co-workers and meeting up at The Creamery for a big cone. But there are so many more ways to keep in touch today compared to years ago. I've sent a few postcards home since I've left, but it seems so antiquated. By the time they're received, people have already seen the pictures on our website.

While it may sound cliché to say I have all the information and technology at my fingertips, taking this trip would be a monumental challenge without it. Having the ability to find a campground or parking spot everyday and then having the phone numbers pop up on a simple Google search, saves time and money beyond what I can measure. I commend all those who did this before me, before all the technology. I also thank them for paving the way.

It's not all about the digital experience though. We still cook our marshmallows over a campfire. We still dip our feet in the same ocean. And we can leave all the devices behind when we take a look outside before going to bed to appreciate a big yellow moon hanging over the pine trees.

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