

Our Trip Takes Us

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By Becky Hirn

As a reader and a writer it's interesting to see the way people use words. Besides written language I take notice of the differences in speech too. I think it amuses most people to hear different accents and phrases. As we travel, I'm coming across some of these differences and even seeing things in a new light.

As I was walking into a grocery store in Maryland a woman who was finished loading her groceries into her van turned to me and said "Need a buggy?" and pushed her cart my way. I've also heard clerks call these carriages. I thought it was funny because buggies and carriages usually make me think of babies, not groceries. Then I took the cart from her, said thanks and lifted Carter up into the seat.

Another term I've learned on the East Coast has to do with where to purchase alcoholic beverages. I had no idea these drinks weren't available in most stores and gas stations as in Ohio. Each state has its own rules, but many times you have to find a package store, or a packy, as the locals call them. Even TomTom knew that.

Signs on the road also contain differences in language. Depending on the state, traffic circles might be called roundabouts. Or they might just be called confusing intersections. Or to merge on to a roadway, all drivers are sometimes directed to "Form one lane."

The most dramatic example of a shift language for me came in Washington D.C. I came to a new level of understanding of the word monumental. I used to think it just meant really big. As in: "Planning for a yearlong trip across America is a monumental task." But monumental goes far beyond that. There is meaning behind the bigness. Monumental represents something.

Staring up at the 19-foot tall statue of Abraham Lincoln that's seated at the west end of the National Mall captures the meaning of the word monumental for me. Touching the base of the Washington Monument as it lights up the night sky and realizing that citizens over a hundred years ago built this 100,000-ton structure, that captures it. Walking the quiet path and viewing what seemed like an endless number of names on the Vietnam Veteran's War Memorial. That's monumental.

Our nation still fully believes in the ideals of its founding fathers and great leaders. We continue to commemorate all those who have fought and died for those principles of freedom. The 233-year-old idea of a new nation is still so monumental that we devote acres of land and erect huge structures to embody it.

I didn't see nearly enough of Washington D.C. in the two days I had to spend there. I could have spent two weeks. But I did realize that it really doesn't matter if a snow cone is called water ice or ice cream is a softie, it's all about perspective. And you don't have to look any farther than Washington D.C. to understand the meaning behind the word monumental.

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 e-mail Becky at beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com