

Our Trip Takes Us

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By Becky Hirn

Once we got back on the road last week after stopping in Delphos, it was like we forgot all the practical items we'd learned about living on the road. For example, early on we found out that we should never start driving the vehicle without knowing where we planned on stopping it. Simple enough. We also learned that making a plan for the day, especially meal plans, are very important. Otherwise, time gets away from us quickly and frustration sets in fast. And finally, museums are wonderful places. But it's a not a good idea to visit too many in one week.

Our first week back on the road, we broke each one of these self-made rules. We left our driveway on a Wednesday evening without knowing where we would be camping out for the night, much less where or if we would find a campsite for Labor Day weekend. We forgot to get groceries before we left. And we went to three museums in three days.

Needless to say we had to relearn a few things. Luckily, the learning curve was shorter this time out. I tried to remind myself of all the reasons for our trip. It's for the kids, for us, our relationships with one another and for the whole travel experience. I knew we could do better on planning our stops and our meals, but when I considered the three museums we just visited I wondered why we choose them over all the other choices we have. What made these special to us?

In Shippshewana, Ind., we missed the big flea market by a day due to our planning problems. We still got the feel for this town full of horse and buggies, big red barns and comfort foods. When we read about a museum explaining the religious culture of the Mennonites and Amish, we felt it would be a good experience for the kids and we might learn something too. I'm really glad we went to the Menno-Hof Museum. We've been to quite a few museums; I have to rank this one pretty high for presentation of material. It's not just all displays and placards to read. They have multimedia displays with lights and sounds, a children's play area, a dungeon room, a ship room, and a traditional Amish kitchen. If I took anything away from this museum it was that, just like other religions, the Mennonites and Amish have had their struggles. They also have a message, like others, to share. And they've found an effective way to do it with the Menno-Hof Museum.

Our next museum stop was just a few miles west in Elkhart, Ind., the birthplace of RVs. For people on a trip like ours, it's hard to pass up The RV/Mobile Home Hall of Fame and Museum. We couldn't miss it. We walked through decades of campers dating back to 1915. It was at this museum that I came to understand that as soon as people started driving in motor vehicles they wanted to find a way to travel longer, go farther and see more. I feel the same way.

Then on Labor Day in Grand Rapids, Mich., we took advantage of free admission to the Public Museum. Amid hundreds of amazing displays was the newest exhibit "Machines in Motion," more than 30 full-scale interactive machines designed by Leonardo da Vinci. While I've read about this renowned artist

and thinker and I'm well aware of his intelligence, this display of his works really showed what a mastermind he was. I couldn't get over the number of inventions he came up with. The physical representations of da Vinci's sketches filled a theatre size room.

In the same way that the quiet Amish have found a progressive way to share their story or DiVinci developed amazing inventions well before his time; I too hope to tap into my creativity to solve the problems we face on the road. It reminds me that there's always new ways to come at a problem. That is comforting to know, even when the problem is only as simple as which museum to choose for the day. That's not always such a bad problem to have.

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