

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

Abby and I could barely contain our laughter in a quiet little bookstore in Virginia last week. I should have just bought the book we were reading. Instead we just stood there for 15-20 minutes giggling like school girls and soaking it all up for free. The book was one of those with photos of weird street signs and signs with messages that get lost in translation. One of our favorites was the big neon sign for the Dynasty Buffet. It's too bad the lights were burnt out for the D and the Y. We also got tickled by a picture of a hand written sign on a door that read "This is not a door."

I love that we get to see mountains, historical places and beaches on our trip. It's great to experience and explore places like Jamestown, Virginia and the Outer Banks, North Carolina, with the kids. I love making all of these things an educational experience. But it's also pretty cool to take a cue from Abby and Carter. They've been the best teachers for laughing, playing and stirring that sense of wonder into the world around us.

If there's a hill great or small, Carter is the first one to challenge everyone to a race to the top. He also keeps us entertained with variations of the word poop. Abby's sense of humor is more refined. But the things we take from her are to slow down, wander around a place, ask questions and take it all in. Also, laugh hard when things are funny. Laugh as hard as you can.

But as expected, road life is not all laughs. There's housework, bills, groceries and the daily chore of finding a place to park. There's also parenting. Even on a trip like ours we can get too serious.

Luckily, there are plenty of reminders along the road that life is short, so have some fun. On our way down I-95 in North Carolina we kept seeing these cheesy billboards insisting that we stop at Pedro's South of the Border. South of the North Carolina border, that is. As we got closer to the exit, the billboards became more frequent. "Pedro's Weather Report: Chili Today, Hot Talmale" and my favorite had a huge sausage link on it and read, "You never sausage a place. You're always a wiener at Pedro's."

Even without all the signage, there's no way a traveler could miss South of the Border, especially approaching at night like we did. There wasn't a building in the 350-acre complex not lit with neon. From the 200-foot Sombrero tower to the fireworks superstore and everything in between, I didn't want to miss this wild Vegas-style stop.

Sure, it was really just a gaudy highway tourist trap. But it sure was fun to take our picture with the gigantic ape and drive through the legs of the neon mariachi man. And we made it out only buying a couple sodas and 12 postcards for \$1. And we laughed. And we played a couple 25-cent arcade games. We wandered around and asked the employees questions and took it all in.

Sometimes I wonder if I took this trip to teach my kids about the world around us, about history, geography, art and society. Or if it's the other way around. Because they sure have taught me a lot about laughing and playing.

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