

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

It was six months ago that Dan and I could finally tell people about this big trip we had been secretly planning for nearly two years. After the initial shock and the barrage of questions about a yearlong trip around the country, I noticed another thing. It was something almost everyone had in common even though it was different for each person. It's probably called wanderlust. What I noticed was that each person had a picture in their head when they started dreaming about traveling around the United States. Some people saw sunshine and beaches and sand between their toes. Others saw themselves driving the open road. Some people looked at the country from a historical perspective. I feel really lucky that my friends and family let me in on their pictures. I got to see what's really special to them. Abby's godmother was so excited about the trip. She said, "Just think of all the churches you'll get to see. What a treat!" My cousin's husband, a professional photographer, also fell in love with the idea. He said, "If I had the chance to travel the country I'd capture it all with my camera."

I had a picture too. Actually, I had several pictures of what it would be like. One of the things our trip has given me a chance to do is read. I love to shop for books and read books. It seems like everywhere we go, we end up shuffling through stacks of books or putting our ear to our shoulder to read the titles on the shelves at a bookstore. In Delaware on a rainy day, it was the Atlantic Bookstore, a huge store with discount prices. Dan found a biography on Ben Franklin and I got a guidebook to Washington DC. Then in Jackson, GA and Charleston, SC, we found library book sales. I got another guidebook, Texas, and a couple classics.

I'll never have the time, even on a yearlong trip, to read everything I've picked up. We have been reading more though, especially to the kids. My parents read to me and it's something I'm trying to pass on. I really enjoyed it when Mom and Dad used slightly different voices for each character. I also liked it when my elementary school teachers read aloud and stopped to explain a word or a phrase that the class might not understand. I use these techniques with the kids in the hopes of creating the same excitement I have for reading.

So far on the trip, we've read timeless tales like "Cinderella," "The Beauty and the Beast" and a clear favorite, "The Wizard of Oz." At one of our book shopping stops, I picked up a book of fairy tales. I couldn't believe how many stories I'd forgotten all about, like "The Shoemaker and the Elves" and "Rumpelstiltskin." The stories came back clearly once I read them to the kids. We've also introduced some other popular children's books like Harry Potter, (Abby's on book two now) and "The Invention of Hugo Cabret," a wonderful read for children and adults.

Reading has always been a part of my life. Even when I was still young enough to take naps, I used to sneak picture books and comics in bed with me. Later as a teenager, science fiction was my escape. Right now I'm re-reading a high school favorite by John Steinbeck, "The Pearl," and Abby and I are reading "A Wrinkle in Time" as part of her language class. I keep hoping the kids are picking up my love of reading and books. When I see Abby sneaking in extra reading at bedtime or when Carter begs for one more chapter of Wizard of Oz, I guess that's my answer.

I got a gift for my birthday last month that answers it better than anything. Abby made me bookmarks for all the books I have stacked around the RV. She wrote little sayings on them like, "Reading is growing," and "I love you Mom." This thoughtful gift not only comes from the heart, it's also a reflection of what she sees as important to me. My favorite bookmark is "Read as long as you want."

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