

ers, and then left by breaking out the driver's side window while the parents and kids were huddled in the pickup topper.

*Again, planning is imperative to a successful adventure.*

I like to plan stops on long drives. Sometimes we don't visit each one, but it pays to do the research in case you want to stretch your legs. After you plot the drive and where you want to visit based upon your research and notes, you'll have options for each day. For example, if it is raining, you skip the hike, but can tour the cowboy museum. The National Park Service organizes a program called Junior Rangers. You'll find this information available at every national park. Trained to teach all ages of youngsters, these rangers offer coloring books and stickers to fulfill the Junior Ranger badge requirements. Following the instructions is easy, and you don't have to make up a lesson plan. Again, this information is right on the National Park websites.

## 2) Permit flexibility

Permitting time flexibility is important to enjoy these parks. Stopping to use the binoculars as a grizzly bear waddles his way up a grassy mountainside is exactly why you are on this trip with the family. Permitting time for extra moments to watch a moose herd wading in the sloughs, lifting their majestic heads, grasses dripping from munching mouths, that is not going to be a scene in Iowa.

Permitting time for a bison herd to sit on a Yellowstone roadway that you want to travel is necessary, even when it takes an extra 480 minutes. Remember, you planned for this with color-



*See that red shirt up the path? That is me letting go of my 18-year old son as he explores paths that I won't follow. Trusting the lessons repeated for a decade of home education are firm: look where you step.*

ing books, games, and binoculars.

Permitting others to share their experiences gave me patience to deal with my own family traveling. I researched the parks for months, watched videos, read travel books, and asked neighbors for tips. But the most valuable information I learned was from other moms in the hotel breakfast rooms as we drove west. Asking one woman if she was on her way west or east, she shared, over coffee, how she and her teenage daughter spent a week at a dude ranch and were now headed home. The trip was a renewal for them after the murder of the older son in a large city. "It has been an expensive trip, but exactly what we needed," she affirmed. "We don't know how many days we have here, so I've learned to treasure each one."

Permits! Buy a park permit to travel through the parks prior to leaving. We ordered ours online and drove the "fast" lane to enter parks.

Permit time to be grateful. Permit time for experiencing God's creations with your family.

What children learn from travel experiences will vary. My son's report, finishing his homeschool years on this trip, when compared to an eight-year-old's national park report, will read differently. They climbed the same mountains, breathed the same crisp air, shivered in the Tetons (although, maybe you kept the extra blankets that we left at home), and both shared irreplaceable family time. The quiet moments spent looking at God's creation standing on the shores of Jackson Lake was invaluable. No words were needed as we listened to snow runoff crashing down ravines. God made this America for us to enjoy. He means for us to share these moments as families. Plan, Permit, and then take pleasure in these moments.

Our journey included a brief stop at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, S.D. I was the only one to get out in the rain to see the unique building up close. Again, permitting flexibility kept the atmosphere inside the vehicle peaceful.

The Minuteman Missile National Historic Site on Interstate 90 east of Wall Drug was a long-held goal of our son's. Watching the educational film, learning the site's history, and buying a deck of



*One of our hikes included fording a creek that had swelled to a stream with late snows melting in the high altitudes. It was Ben's job to decide if we could safely cross. And, no, we didn't attempt a crossing. This task was one way to encourage a teenager to make a decision based upon few facts and the unknown current.*