

Pack your patience

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Last month our family took its biggest vacation yet, traveling a total of 1971 miles from our home in Pennsylvania to several stops in Ohio, and then on to Kentucky to view the total solar eclipse before heading back home again. By all accounts, it was a really great trip and a terrific experience for our family. I've been spending time figuring out why.

Although I was excited about the trip on the whole, there were a few things I wasn't looking forward to. We planned to visit the Air Force Museum, which was on my husband's bucket list, but definitely not on mine (or my kids'). We were headed to the center line for the eclipse, which means we were signing up for excessive crowds and traffic, two things I typically avoid with a vengeance. (While I clearly wasn't sure this would be the case when I signed up for it, all that traveling for 2 hours and 44 seconds of totality was worth it. Totally, totally worth it.) And the last day of our week-long trip was going to be 600 miles, about 200 more than we had ever traveled in a single day before. Ouch.

How did we make it through? Day in and day out, we "packed our patience," an expression we use to remind us that we might be walking into something that could be frustrating, and we should take a good amount of patience into the situation with us. It became a mantra for us. When we were headed into the Air Force Museum, I reminded the kids that this was one of dad's dreams, and therefore, it was important for us to be supportive. I got them to agree with me to pack their patience. (The promise of astronaut ice cream in the gift shop helped too.)

Each time we heard a report about how colossal the traffic would be around Hopkinsville, Kentucky we would remind ourselves we would just need to be patient. We also planned accordingly to minimize the pain. We left Bowling Green at 5:30 AM to beat the rush, and barely had to wait when we arrived at the farm where we had reservations a little after 7:00. We made sure to have plenty to do while we waited in that field for 7 hours (the kids didn't even know I had downloaded movies for them until I pulled out the iPad that day). And we made sure our gas tank was full and we had extra food in case the traffic was as bad as we feared it would be on the way out. And it was. It took us over 7 hours to drive only 230 miles, and though we didn't arrive at our hotel until just before midnight, we were at least still all on speaking terms. It was a good thing we had packed our patience.

This is not just a vacation strategy. I find myself packing my patience often in real life too.

- When I have to go to the post office, I pack my patience, because many times it is a place where I experience long lines and disgruntled customers and employees.
- If I have to call a customer service number for something, I prepare to be transferred many times and put on hold, so if that happens, I'm not hopping mad. And if it doesn't happen and the call is relatively painless, I'm super grateful.
- When I'm headed to the airport, I pack my patience to get through security, waiting, boarding, flying, getting my bags, and getting to my destination.
- I've typically gotten pretty stressed when it comes time to choose health insurance. (Everything's so expensive! What does this mean? What if this happens?) But this year, I'm going to remind myself to pack my patience and allow enough time for myself to learn about and understand the options so I can feel good about my decision.

When you pack your patience and need it, instead of feeling disappointed and frustrated, you feel a sense of confidence and satisfaction. When you pack your patience and you don't need it, it's a great feeling because now you still have some patience for later. Either way, you win.