Iced Over Shoreline
Saugatuck State Park, Michigan
AMERICAN JOURNEYS:

Notes From the Midwest

Written by Kathleen Rhodes
The mission of the Success for All Foundation is to develop and disseminate research-proven educational programs to ensure that all students, from all backgrounds, achieve at the highest academic levels. These programs were originally developed at Johns Hopkins University.
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The Midwest
About This Blog

Hi! Welcome to the heartland of America, the Midwest. I’m Kathleen, and I’m proud to show you my part of America. I travel a lot around the Midwest with my family, so I thought I’d start a blog about it.

The Midwest is the north-central section of America. It’s made up of twelve states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Illinois has the biggest population of any of these states. It’s also home to the biggest city in the Midwest—Chicago. That’s where I’m from!
Meet Me in St. Louis

Monday, April 29, 2013

We just got back from our trip to Missouri. Some people pronounce it Mi-zoo-ree, and other people say it like Mi-zoo-ruh. Both ways are right.

We spent most of our time in St. Louis, Missouri. St. Louis is a big city on the border of Illinois. One of St. Louis’s most famous landmarks is the Gateway Arch.

The Gateway Arch is the tallest monument in America. When Mom and Dad told me we were going to go to the top of the arch, I didn’t believe them. How do you go up something that is curved?

It turns out, there’s a tram that takes you up one side of the arch. The tram is made up of a group of pods, and each pod carries five people. It was like an elevator and a Ferris wheel! It was fun, but the pods are tiny, so I was glad to get out at the top. You can walk around and look out windows at the top. From one side of the arch, you can see the city of St. Louis. From the other side, you can see across the Mississippi River to Illinois.

After we left the arch, we walked through a big park called Citygarden. The park is filled with sculptures and fountains. One of the fountains is meant for people to play in. Streams of water shoot up into the air, and you can run through them. At night, the water streams light up with colorful lights.
We also visited Grant’s Farm while we were in St. Louis. Grant’s Farm is where President Ulysses S. Grant once lived. We took a tour of the farm, which was a lot of fun. Animals from all over the world live on the farm. Shows are held to teach visitors about the animals. I saw elephants, capybaras, and red kangaroos up close. My favorite part of the trip was the horse stables where some Clydesdale horses live. These horses are known for their calmness and beauty.

We had a lot of fun in St. Louis! Has anyone else been there?

1 Comment:

Paul | Tuesday, April 30, 2013
We went to Forest Park. The World’s Fair was held there in 1904. We explored a big greenhouse. It is called the Jewel Box because of all the beautiful flowers inside it.
When you live somewhere, it’s easy to overlook some of the amazing things that are there. Sometimes you have to be a tourist in your own town. That’s exactly what we did this weekend. I stayed in my hometown, but I didn’t stay at my house. My Uncle Ronald took me and my cousin Penny on a tour of Chicago, Illinois.

The first place Uncle Ronald pointed out was the Willis Tower. That’s the huge skyscraper you might have seen on postcards from Chicago. The Willis Tower is the tallest building in the country. It was called the Sears Tower up until a few years ago, so some people still call it that.

Then we went to Millennium Park by the harbor. It is a park inside a bigger park called Grant Park. We stopped for a photo in front of a large shiny sculpture that I always thought was a huge bean. My uncle says it’s really called “Cloud Gate,” but I think I’ll just keep calling it “the bean.”
Next, Uncle Ronald took us to Navy Pier. He told us that the **pier** was originally built for ships carrying passengers and goods to Chicago. During World War I, many Navy **personnel** lived at the pier. In 1927, it was named Navy Pier to honor the sailors who served in the war. Today Navy Pier is a fun place to visit. It has a lot of restaurants and shops, a theater, and a big Ferris wheel.

On our way home, Uncle Ronald pointed out one building that looked very different from the rest. He said it was the Chicago Water Tower. The water tower is one of the few buildings that survived the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. No one knows exactly how the fire started, but we do know that it started near a barn. There’s a legend that says the barn caught fire when a cow kicked over a lantern. The fire spread really quickly because it was a windy night, and many of the buildings and roads were made from wood. It took three days to put the fire out. Much of the city was destroyed. **Residents** worked hard to rebuild it. Uncle Ronald said he will take us to the Chicago History Museum to learn more about the fire one day soon.

I ♥ Chicago!
3 COMMENTS:

Jordan | Wednesday, May 15, 2013
When I was in Chicago, I ate at the restaurant where deep dish-pizza was invented. Now I can’t get enough of Chicago-style pizza!

Thuy | Friday, May 17, 2013
Hi, Kathleen! I visited Chicago last year. I always heard people call it the “Windy City,” but I didn’t really think it was all that windy.

Candice | Friday, May 17, 2013
Some people say the Windy City didn’t get its nickname because of the breeze. In the 1800s, Chicago politicians were said to be windy and full of hot air because of all the boasting they did about the city. Other cities’ newspapers called Chicago the Windy City.

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Last weekend, we headed east to Indiana. Indiana is called the Crossroads of America. One of the first national highways ran through Indiana. Settlers passed through Indiana to begin new lives in the West. Many other **interstate highways** now cross Indiana.

Our first stop was in the state’s **capital**, Indianapolis. Indianapolis is called the racing capital of the world.

We visited the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The Speedway is the biggest sporting **facility** in the world. Several major car racing events are held there each year. The Indy 500 is one of them. I watch that race on TV every year. We didn’t get to watch a live race, but we did get to go for a lap around the track. There are tour buses that drive people around the track. If you’re old enough, you can also drive a real race car around the track! That would be so cool.

We spent another day taking in the sights around Indy. We visited the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Monument Circle in the middle of the city. The monument honors all the heroes Indiana lost in wars. We climbed to the top of the monument and got a great view of the city.

We also visited Lockerbie Square. It is the oldest neighborhood in the city. Most of the homes were built in the 1800s. Their owners work to preserve them and keep a piece of history.
After sightseeing in Indianapolis, we decided to check out the Indiana Caverns. We took a boat tour on an underground river. The guide told us how stalactites and stalagmites were formed. There are some really big waterfalls inside the cave, which were neat to see.

Before heading home, we made sure to stop in Lincoln City. Lincoln City was named for President Abraham Lincoln, who spent his childhood there. We learned all about the Lincoln family and what Abe Lincoln was like when he was young.

2 COMMENTS:

Shelby | Saturday, June 29, 2013
Great post, Kathleen! We visited Amish Acres when we went to Indiana. We toured the first farm in the state to be settled by an Amish family. Indiana has one of the biggest populations of Amish in the nation. The Amish believe in simple living and plain dress. Many Amish don’t use electricity or technology, and they use horses and buggies instead of cars. It was neat to learn about how they live.

Grant | Saturday, June 29, 2013
I’m a proud Hoosier! That’s what people from Indiana are called. No one knows for sure why we’re called Hoosiers, but there are a few theories. My favorite theory says that long ago, when visitors knocked on the door to a home in Indiana, the home owner would say, “Who’s yere?”
I’m on the road again, in the middle of another great car trip. Mom and Dad really love driving! But this time, they didn’t have to do all the work. We rode a ferry into Iowa!

Wisconsin and Iowa are separated by the Mississippi River. The Mississippi is the second longest river in America. It’s one of the widest too. During pioneer times, there were no bridges over the river. To get across, people took their wagons onto ferries. The ferry service has been running since 1833. The captain told us that the first Cassville ferry was a rowboat. The second was powered by horses walking on treadmills! Ferries are a lot different today.

We stopped in Cedar Rapids on our way to Des Moines. Dad said that Cedar Rapids is one of the most important cities for corn in the world. Iowa grows more corn than most countries do. Dad knows a lot about corn because he grew up on a corn farm. While we ate lunch, Dad pointed out everything in my meal that was made from corn. The bread on my sandwich had cornstarch in it, and the peanut butter and jelly both had corn syrup in them. The potato chips were cooked in vegetable oil made from corn, and the plastic bottle I drank out of was made from corn! He said corn is in other things too, such as toothpaste and rubber tires.
When we finally got to our destination, we were ready for some fun! Luckily, the Iowa State Fair was going on in Des Moines. Iowa has one of the biggest state fairs. More than one million people attend each year. We had a great time riding rides and watching livestock shows. We learned how to milk a cow, and we watched people compete in a butter sculpting contest. We also tasted foods we had never seen before. Almost anything you could want came deep-fried—even butter! Mom wouldn’t let me taste the fried butter, but I tried some fried ice cream. Mom and Dad promised we can go to the Illinois State Fair next year so I can compare ours to this one.

We’ll be in Des Moines for a few more days. Any cool places to check out?

2 COMMENTS:

Amelia | Thursday, August 8, 2013
Welcome to the Hawkeye State! Be sure to check out the Iowa Hall of Pride while you’re here. It’s a whole museum in honor of famous Iowans, such as George Washington Carver and Olympic gymnast Shawn Johnson.

Mikhail | Friday, August 9, 2013
Take a tour of the Iowa State Capitol Building! The dome of the building is covered in gold and it sparkles in the sunlight.
Hello from Nebraska!

Mom and Dad are packing up the car for the ride back to Chicago. I only have a few minutes, but I wanted to tell you about our time here in the Cornhusker State. Just like Iowa, Nebraska produces a lot of corn. The name cornhusker comes from the way corn is harvested.

Nebraska is one of the Great Plains states. The Great Plains is the region between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. The land here is called the prairie. It is very flat, and there are not many trees.

We visited the Homestead National Monument of America. We learned about the Homestead Act of 1862. The act said that a settler could have 160 acres of land for free. All they had to do was live on the land and farm it for five years first. Millions of people came to America to claim land.

We also went to the Durham Museum in Omaha. The museum is inside an old train station, which is pretty awesome. We toured train cars from the 1800s and 1900s. It was interesting to see how people used to travel. We also saw some life-size models of homes. People in Nebraska have lived in all sorts of homes. Some people lived inside teepees made of rawhide, and others lived in homes built into a hill! Those are called earth lodges. Of course, other people lived in cottages and homes built of wood.
My favorite place that we visited in Omaha was Boys Town. Boys Town was started as an orphanage for boys. Eventually, the orphanage outgrew its building and a whole village was built. The boys who lived there elected their own mayor and members of government! Hundreds of boys and girls live there today.

Mom and Dad just told me that the car is packed, so I’ve got to power down now.

2 Comments:

Rachel | Monday, October 21, 2013
When I was in Omaha, we walked across a bridge above the Missouri River. There’s a sign on the bridge that points out the state line. I stood with one foot in Nebraska and the other in Iowa!

Abigail | Friday, October 25, 2013
My great-great-great-grandfather was a homesteader! My family still has the certificate he signed to claim the land.
Great Cities, Great Lakes

Wednesday, November 20, 2013

Many Midwestern states make up the borders of the Great Lakes. There is a reason they call them great. They’re huge! My city, Chicago, is on Lake Michigan. Today I’m going to blog about some of the other cities along the Great Lakes.

We recently went to Detroit, Michigan. Detroit sits on a river that connects Lake Erie and Lake Huron. You might have heard Detroit called the Motor City. That’s because many American car companies got their start in Detroit. Henry Ford built his first car in Detroit in 1896.

![Detroit skyline](image-url)
There are a lot of great things to do in Detroit. For history buffs, there’s Fort Wayne. It’s fun to take a picnic lunch and tour the fort, which is shaped like a star.

Music lovers should definitely visit the Motown Museum. Motown Records got its start in Detroit. Motown artists mixed pop and soul. They brought a new sound to the world that changed music forever. The Temptations, Diana Ross & the Supremes, and Michael Jackson and the Jackson 5 were Motown superstars.

Detroit also has the largest museum of African American history in the world. You know Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech? It turns out that he practiced the speech on the people of Detroit two months before he gave the speech in Washington, DC!

If you leave Detroit and drive south for a few hours along the shore of Lake Erie, you’ll end up in Ohio. I’ve been to Ohio a few times, and there is a lot to see there.

Toledo is a city in Ohio on the border with Michigan. Toledo is called the Glass City. Many glass companies are located there. Much of the glass used for bottles, cars, and buildings is made in Toledo.
About two hours from Toledo is another cool city, Cleveland. Cleveland is home to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I love going there! My parents get all excited about rock stars I’ve never even heard of. I like to learn about bands and singers I hear on the radio.

Ohio is also a great place to learn about presidents. Seven U.S. presidents were born in Ohio. There are buildings and memorials dedicated to these presidents all over the state. I especially like touring their former homes. It’s interesting to see how they lived before they moved into the White House.

2 COMMENTS:

Marnie | Friday, November 22, 2013
When we were in Michigan, we took a boat tour of the Soo Locks. The locks help boats move between Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes. Lake Superior is about twenty-one feet above the other lakes. It was neat to watch the water level in the lock rise and lift our boat up to the same level as Lake Superior.

I haven’t been to Toledo or Cleveland, but I have been to Cincinnati. The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center is there. You can learn all about how slaves traveled along the Underground Railroad to freedom.
Hello, blog world! I just got back from a fun but chilly trip to Wisconsin. Did you know that more cheese is produced in Wisconsin than anywhere else in the United States? A lot of other dairy products are made there too. It’s called America’s Dairyland.

I love eating cheese curds when we visit Wisconsin. Cheese curds are leftovers from cheese making that are often served fried. We didn’t stop for any when we passed through the state back in August, so I made sure to get some this time.

We visited two cities, Milwaukee and Green Bay. Milwaukee is another Great Lakes city. It sits on the edge of Lake Michigan. I learned a lot more about the Great Lakes on this trip. We visited a big science museum called Discovery World. It has a lot of exhibits about the Great Lakes and the plants and animals that live in them. We also went to Mitchell Park Conservatory to see The Domes. It was really neat. There were three big glass domes, each with a different climate and plants. My favorite was the tropical dome. It felt just like I was inside a rainforest!
As we drove through the state, I noticed that a lot of the town and city names sounded much different from those in other states. Many of them are French words, thanks to the French colonists who explored Wisconsin. There’s a city named Fond du Lac. That means “bottom of the lake” in French. Can you guess where the city is located? At the lower end of a lake—Lake Winnebago, to be exact. Other places are named after words from Native American languages. Native Americans lived in Wisconsin long before settlers arrived. The town of Oshkosh is named for Chief Oshkosh of the Menominee tribe.

In Green Bay, we visited the frozen tundra. That’s what locals call their outdoor football stadium. Even though there was a foot of snow on the ground, we piled on layers of clothing to go see the game. I was amazed that there was so much snow outside the stadium, but none inside. Dad told me that the fans spent the days before the game shoveling all the snow off the stands. He said that the Green Bay Packers are owned by their fans, instead of just one person. How cool is that? Imagine owning a part of your favorite sports team. The Packers are the only professional sports team that is owned by its fans.
I’m home in Chicago now, but I still shiver thinking about how cold it was at that game! Have any of you been to Wisconsin? What did you think?

2 Comments:

**Bryan | Tuesday, December 31, 2013**

Did you go snowmobiling at all? Most of Wisconsin is covered by snow all winter. Every year, people create thousands of miles of snowmobile trails across the state. I love to **snowmobile** with my family.

**Ethan | Thursday, January 2, 2014**

I hope you went ice fishing while you were there! It’s a little scary to walk on top of a frozen lake, but it’s neat to watch people drill holes through the ice and go fishing. Some people even set up huts on the ice to help them keep warm while they fish.
Today I want to tell you about the Land of 10,000 Lakes. Actually, it has 11,842 lakes, but 10,000 just sounds better. Do you know what state I’m talking about? It’s Minnesota.

Look at this map of Minnesota. Only a little part of the state touches Lake Superior. The rest of it touches other states and part of Canada. So I was surprised to learn that Minnesota actually has more shoreline than Hawaii, Florida, and California combined! That’s because it has so many lakes and rivers.

We visited Minneapolis and Saint Paul. The cities are called the Twin Cities because they are so close to each other. They are pretty different, though. The buildings in Minneapolis look more modern, and the buildings in Saint Paul look more historic.

I went ice skating at a big ice rink in Minneapolis. There are ice rinks all over the city. It seemed like everyone knew how to skate. I fell down a lot, but it was fun anyway. Locals told us that ice hockey is one of the most popular sports in Minnesota. In fact, Minnesota sends more ice hockey players to the pros than any other state.
My favorite part of the trip was visiting the Mall of America. It’s no ordinary shopping mall. Sure, the mall has shops, but it also has a miniature golf course and an aquarium. It even has an amusement park with roller coasters and other rides. What a fun place to visit!

Has anyone else visited other cities or towns in Minnesota?

2 Comments:

Kelisha | Sunday, February 16, 2014
Way up in the northern part of the state is Split Rock Lighthouse. The lighthouse is on the shore of Lake Superior. It was built more than 100 years ago. We took a tour of the lighthouse and of the light keeper’s home. It was really interesting to learn what it was like to take care of a lighthouse.

Jonathan | Monday, February 17, 2014
We visited the National Eagle Center in Wabasha. I got to see a bald eagle and a golden eagle up close. I even had my picture taken with one! A lot of wild eagles live near the center, and you can see them flying around.
What do George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln have in common other than being presidents? They are all represented on Mount Rushmore.

Mount Rushmore is one of the most famous mountains in the world. The faces of these four presidents are carved into the side of the mountain. Each head is as tall as a six-story building. I got to see them last week when we took a trip to South Dakota. It was really impressive!

Not far away is another giant mountain carving. The Crazy Horse Memorial is dedicated to the great Lakota chief named Crazy Horse. The statue isn’t complete, but it’s still pretty neat to see. The sculptor who began the carving wanted it to be done slowly so it would be done right. He never set a deadline for the memorial to be finished, so no one knows when it will be complete.
We also visited the **Badlands**. The Badlands are covered in tall, soft rocks. Wind and water have worn down the rocks into sharp, spiky shapes. The Badlands in South Dakota are one of the best places to find fossils, including fossils of the big saber-tooth cats that lived there long ago. Today you can see bighorn sheep, bison, prairie dogs, and rattlesnakes.

There are badlands in North Dakota too. I learned that North Dakota and South Dakota was once one big **territory**. People couldn’t decide where the capital should be, so Dakota was split into North Dakota and South Dakota. They both became states on the same day.
3 Comments:

Mary Leigh | Tuesday, April 22, 2014
The name Dakota comes from a Sioux Indian wording meaning friend. :-)  

Christine | Tuesday, April 22, 2014
Have you read any of the Little House on the Prairie books? Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote a few of them about the time she spent in De Smet, South Dakota. I’ve heard you can visit a lot of the places she wrote about.

Andy | Thursday, April 24, 2014
Your blog posts sound like your family really likes to learn about the presidents. You should visit Rapid City. There are life-size bronze statues of all the past presidents. It’s fun to go around and take your picture with each one!

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South Dakota prairie

Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about life in South Dakota.
Greetings from Kansas!

Kansas is right in the middle of Tornado Alley. Tornado Alley is an area in the middle of the country where a lot of tornadoes form. I was a little nervous when I found out about Tornado Alley. Mom told me that people in Kansas have tornado drills, just like my school has fire drills. That made me feel a little better, but I’m still going to keep my eye on the sky.

Storm chasers travel all around Tornado Alley. They track huge storms and tornadoes. Many of them are scientists. Sometimes they get really close to tornadoes. Their job is extremely dangerous. I got to meet a storm chaser at a science museum. He showed me how I can create a mini tornado at home. Here’s how!
We did a lot more in Kansas than just worry about tornadoes. One day, we went to the first Pony Express station. Have you ever heard of the Pony Express? It began in 1860. Men would carry mail from Missouri to California on horseback. They would change horses when the horses got tired. It took ten days for a letter to be delivered. Back then, that was fast! People were amazed at how quickly mail could reach the West. But when the telegraph was invented, the Pony Express went broke.

### Tornado in a Jar

**Materials**
- water
- dish soap
- glitter
- glass jar with lid

**Instructions**
1. Fill the jar about three-quarters full with water.
2. Add several drops of dish soap.
3. Add a pinch of glitter. The glitter makes the tornado easier to see.
4. Put the lid on the jar.
5. Spin or swirl the jar for a few seconds until you can see a vortex forming. The water vortex looks a lot like what a tornado looks like in the sky.
Today we went to a museum in Wichita called Cowtown. The museum is a whole town where people act and dress as if it is the year 1870. We walked through the town and visited shops. It was fun to talk to actors and learn about the Wild West.

In the late 1880s, cow towns such as Wichita, Abilene, and Dodge City sprung up around Kansas. Cowboys herded cattle to these towns for trade. Cow towns became famous for the shootouts that would happen between lawmen and outlaws.

We have a few more days left here in Kansas. Anyone have any suggestions for places to visit?

2 Comments:

Vic | Friday, June 27, 2014
I love learning about the Wild West! Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok were lawmen in Kansas cow towns. You should check out the Kansas Cowboy Hall of Fame in Dodge City.

Henry | Saturday, June 28, 2014
Last year, my parents took me to an underground salt museum. I thought learning about salt would be really boring, but it was really cool. When you visit the museum, you take an elevator 650 feet underground to tour salt mines that are millions of years old.
badlands: An area where wind and rain form rocks into unusual shapes.

capital: 1) The city where a state’s or country’s government is located. 2) A city or state that is special for a certain reason. For example, Kansas is the wheat capital of the country because it produces more wheat than any other state.

climatic: The average weather conditions of a place.

colonists: People from other countries who build settlements in a new country.

cow town: Also called a cattle town, a cow town is where lots of cows and steers are or used to be.

destination: A place to which someone travels.

earth lodges: Homes built from domes covered with earth.

elected: Voted into office by the people.

facility: Building used for a particular activity.

ferry: Boat that carries people and cars across a body of water.

fort: A strong building used for protection during battles.

harbor: Water along the shore where boats can be safely docked or anchored.
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Mitchell Corn Palace
Mitchell, South Dakota
Look at all my pictures and blog entries from my trips to explore America’s Midwest!

Thanks, Kathleen