In middle school phy ed, we always had to do physical fitness tests. I generally liked these and did pretty well… except for the sit and reach. I had/have zero flexibility and always failed that test miserably.

However, flexibility is not all about the physical aspect, as I recently discovered with our family vacation to Missouri. Michelle and I had visited the Show-Me State on our honeymoon nearly 17 years ago and decided to take the kids through Kansas City, St. Louis, and Hannibal (hometown of Mark Twain). We'd visit some of the places we had all those years ago, along with baseball games at Kauffmann Stadium and Busch Stadium.

We didn't plan much, preferring to fly a bit by the seat of our pants – no reservations, tickets, etc. This worked well right from the start. We had planned on visiting Kansas City first, but upon checking the weather forecast before we left, we saw extreme heat warnings for the next two days. We didn't want to think about watching a ballgame in that, much less do anything else. Flexibility kicked in with the ability to change it up and head to Hannibal first, leaving KC as our last stop.

I expected to need flexibility with driving all that way, anticipating plenty of road construction along the way. However, that flexibility wasn’t needed much. There was no place in Missouri where there was more than a mile stretch of construction, except areas marked as having lane closures at night, when the crews could work out of the sun and it wouldn't stop up traffic as much. The roads in Missouri are beautiful; maybe Minnesota could take some notes?

The great thing about not planning is that you don’t have to be all these places at certain times. You can take time to explore and discover places you might not have otherwise. Just wandering the streets of Hannibal and looking at all the Mark Twain-related stores was fun. We timed tours of the caves and a steamboat cruise pretty close to the mark and enjoyed the ability to just go back to our hotel and relax.

Flexibility of headwear is important when visiting other stadiums. While I wore my Minnesota Twins cap around both St. Louis and Kansas City, I bought hats for the local home teams to wear to their games. Even at the game, I discovered the flexibility of fans. In St. Louis, I had
Cardinals fans next to me who lived in Chicago, a tough sell to Cubs supporters. There was also a San Diego Padres fan behind me. The toughest might have been the Pittsburgh fans around us, since that was the opposing team!

We had originally planned on visiting the zoo in KC, but found out the one in St. Louis was free and ranked one of the best in the world, so we changed plans. Upon arriving in KC, we found out there was a Legoland there, which Anton said we HAD to see, so we adjusted our plans.

We found flexibility in others as well. Trying to find a museum in KC, I got hopelessly lost and ended up in Kansas. Stopping by a bank to get directions, a gentleman there showed the goodness in mankind and actually had me follow him down some crazy roads to just a short distance from our goal – now that’s a flexible schedule!

The flexibility even extended to when we returned home. We had planned on being gone six full days and driving home the seventh. However, we were sick of hotels and just wanted to get home, so we drove from KC to Ellendale the last evening rather than stopping again. It was nice to get into our own beds, even if it was late!

There are times it’s nice to follow a more rigid schedule; our trip to Florida a couple years ago is a good example of that. But these driving trips are more exciting without as many plans. We still saw the things we really wanted to see and also found some neat places, like the Science Museum in St. Louis.

If you’re open to being flexible, I highly recommend a trip to Missouri. There really is a lot to see, but it’s best discovered on the fly. Sometimes those vacations can create the best memories!

A couple items of business before I depart and start thinking about school again! First, this is my 156th column. My New Ulm math tells me that makes three full years of writing in this space! Thank you so much to all of you who read my ramblings every week. A special thanks to those of you who continue to give me feedback, whether it’s positive or negative; I really enjoy hearing from you!
Also, my apologies for not having a Word of the Week last week. I had one, really I did! It’s in my file on my computer, but I failed to copy it on my e-mail to the paper. So here are last week’s and this week’s!

**Word of the Week:** Last week’s word was osculate, which means to touch or bring together, as in, “The music was able to osculate the congregation, as everyone belted out their favorite hymn.” This week’s word is tellurian, which means an inhabitant of Earth, as in, “It was interesting to see the many varieties of tellurians while on vacation.” Impress your friends and confuse your enemies!