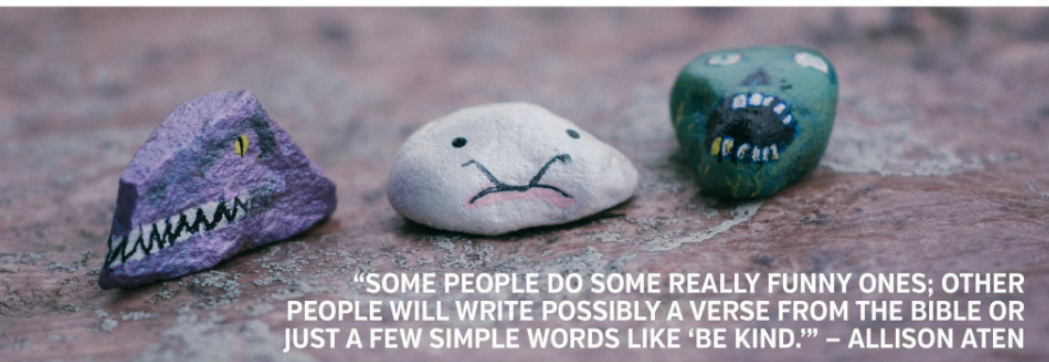


# A ROCKY TREND

BY MONICA ALBERS



**"SOME PEOPLE DO SOME REALLY FUNNY ONES; OTHER PEOPLE WILL WRITE POSSIBLY A VERSE FROM THE BIBLE OR JUST A FEW SIMPLE WORDS LIKE 'BE KIND.'"** — ALLISON ATEN

## **SOUTH DAKOTA ROCKS, A PROJECT THAT'S SPREAD KINDNESS ACROSS THE STATE, THE COUNTRY, AND EVEN THE WORLD, BEGAN WITH A SINGLE SMILE.**

The first rock was simple: a brightly colored flower painted across a stone.

Fifth-grader **Scarlett Tefft** and her mom **Allison Aten** discovered it while visiting DeLand, Fla. last winter. The rock was one of many decorated and spread around the area. Allison says it was Scarlett's idea to share the project with the Midwest.

"Sometimes in South Dakota, there's not that many things going on that make people smile, and in the summertime, when we had nothing to do, we could just paint some rocks," Scarlett said. "When people find them, it makes them smile, and it's really fun to do it with friends."

Aten says there aren't really any rules when it comes to the project — just paint a design or a kind word on any rock with the hashtag **#605Rocks**, and leave it somewhere for a passerby to discover. If you find a rock, you're encouraged to take a photo of it and post it on Facebook, hold onto it, or re-hide it yourself.

"It's been really fun," Aten said. "A lot of times the girls would hide them and sit off to the side and watch people walk by them... some people wouldn't even notice them, other people would actually pick them up and look at them and put them back down, sometimes people would take them."

Scarlett agreed. "It's fun to hide them in spots and parks where people will be happy to find them in."

Aten says they started painting rocks last January, but it really took off over the summer when Scarlett and her friends spent time decorating over summer break. The Facebook page now has nearly 2,000 likes and it has spread to elementary schools across the state. Satellite projects have also popped up like **#RapidCityRocks** and **#SiouxFallsRocks** to share more locally.

"We did not really expect it to take off the way it did, they're all elementary school students and don't really have social media," Aten said. So Mom runs the Facebook page and

helps organize events at youth groups and happenings like **Family Fest** in Sioux Falls.

Aten says the rocks are journeying to a growing number of places — from New York to Denver, Chicago to Kansas City. The project even made it to another continent, when a traveler brought one to Egypt from Rapid City. Their **#605Rocks** post includes the little stone being displayed by an Egyptian tour guide with the **Great Pyramids of Giza** in the background.

Following the hashtag, you'll find posted stories of the little rocks that have cheered people up on rough days — discovered after the loss of a job or pet or during health challenges. Kids at birthday parties and co-workers at office parties spend an afternoon painting rocks to share around the state. Strangers connect online as a person who finds a rock discovers the person who painted it for them.

Scarlett says that's the best part.

"My favorite part about doing this, is that when people find the rocks, they can post a picture, and it always makes them smile, and it makes us smile, too."

Aten says it's meant a lot to her to watch the kids take up the project. "This was their first opportunity to take ownership of something and be proud of it. And I think they got into the excitement and started to see the positive impact it had on people, and it kind of fueled them to want to do more."

And as a mom, it's been particularly sweet.

"As a mom, it was really special to sit back and watch, and to watch it grow and watch the support they got from everybody in the community and are continuing to get," she said. "It shows them that it's not always about receiving... it's about giving."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THEIR GROUPS OR PAGES ON FACEBOOK.**

## JOIN THE Fun

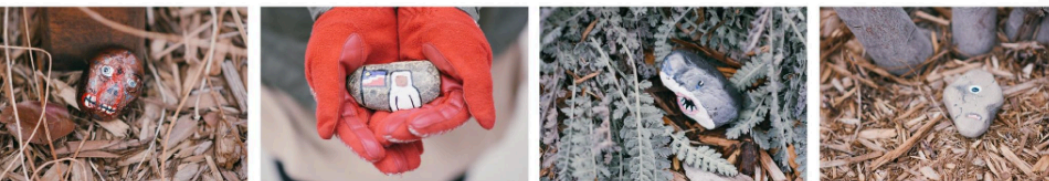
*Find*  
A DECORATED ROCK HIDDEN BY ANOTHER PARTICIPANT

*Share*  
A PHOTO OF IT ON FACEBOOK

*Hide*  
THE ROCK IN A NEW PLACE TO BRIGHTEN SOMEONE'S DAY

*Design*  
YOUR OWN ROCK — ACRYLIC PAINTS WORK BEST

*Tag*  
THE ROCK WITH THE #605ROCKS, #SIOUXFALLSROCKS, OR #RAPIDCITYROCKS HASHTAG



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