As the daughter of a public school teacher, the importance of education was instilled in me from an early age. An exceptional report card was required during my K-12 years—because my parents wouldn't accept anything less. Despite my family values, I was a reluctant student and often needed prodding in order to excel. More often than not I found myself reciting the all too familiar phrase, "but I'm never going to use this!" I constantly questioned the importance and relevance of many required lessons along the way. It wasn’t until I started pursuing experiences outside of the classroom that I began to understand how education was taking an integral role in my life: my many years of schooling gave me the capabilities to travel. The meaning of education has evolved for me over time, and today education has a different meaning to me than it did when I was in grade school. Through travel, I’ve gained the ability to never stop learning.

The idea of seeing what life was like beyond the eastern seaboard always had a special allure to me, and I spent countless Saturdays as a child watching National Geographic VHS tapes I had rented from the library, imagining what it would be like to be in those faraway places and longing to experience firsthand all these fascinating, unique and peculiar things I'd only been able to daydream about. The world seemed so big and there was always so much more to learn about it. It was unfathomable to me that one day I would be able to visit these wonders myself and take it all in, feeling life in a way that can’t be done by looking at pictures, studying maps, or watching documentaries. I could read about different cultures through a social studies textbook, but this to me this type of learning felt largely incomplete. To truly know what a place is like, it is best experienced. To truly understand the world, one needs to explore it.

A few years into my twenties, I could no longer wait for the “right time” to take my first steps into a foreign place. The itch to get out and travel became intense and I was determined to make these dreams a reality. I began saving every possible penny, depriving myself of weekend
dinners out with friends, new clothes or the latest technology. I decided that traveling is what I was going to do, and I would no longer wait for a companion to have the ability, finances, or time to go with me. I felt confident that I could *carpe diem* on my own, and if anything I knew that beginning to travel by myself would be the biggest learning experience I could ever have.

Reflecting upon my first solo trip overseas, I kept returning to a quote by Thoreau that had struck a chord with me: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Although I wasn’t traveling to Walden Pond as Thoreau did, this quote showed me that our journeys came from a similar place in the heart. We both wanted an incredible experience: we wanted to learn what the world had to teach.

Today I am in my second semester of nursing school and feel forever indebted to travel itself for the growth that I feel as a person. In day to day life I have become exponentially more confident in my interactions with people and grown ever more patient in trying situations. To approach an uncomfortable scenario assertively was not always a capability of mine, nor a skill that a classroom education brought to me. However, my early education remains the foundation that allowed me to be able to plan and execute my travels. Upon completion of my degree I hope to become a nurse that works all over the world: in essence, a nurse with a never-ending education.