

**CarolAnn Herring, TTS34**

*Since I was young I have had a love for adventure and challenging myself in everything from high school sports to the outdoors to reading. I was raised in a small rural town in Montana, where I still live today. We have a population of 300 and the school consists of 100 kids kindergarten through twelfth grade with graduating classes of three to seven. Living in such a small community, there was not much to do other than explore the creeks, farmland, and mountains around us. My friends and I were free to have adventures, free to figure out what was dangerous or scary.*

*My parents encouraged me to take risks and try new things. As a child I embraced that, but once I started to grow up, for some reason, I grew more reluctant to change. Maybe it was because it seemed as if nothing changed around me. High school sports, day-to-day school work, life at home with my family and dogs...it all seemed repetitive. It wasn't working for me. One day, as I sat in math class, I began to imagine what I might accomplish if I left this place that felt so familiar to me.*

*Months passed. I was stuck in a boring routine that circled around like a carousel. Then my mom found The Traveling School, a program that allowed a selected number of high school girls to step away from their day-to-day lives and into the world. The program offered a chance to explore southern Africa while earning high school credit. My mother helped me apply and when I was accepted, I was overjoyed, but as I prepared for the journey I was plagued with fear. As I stepped off the plane into Zambia, that fear had changed into something else. Although my hands shook and my heart ached for home, I was ready for this adventure. No matter how terrified I was, I could not believe I had escaped that carousel.*

*There was nothing easy about those first weeks or months, to be more realistic, I struggled. For midterms we were asked to write an analytical essay on the novel, Poisonwood Bible. I had never been required to perform a task like that before. I cried over it, I fought with it, but when I finished it, I was surprised with the result. Before my semester abroad, I think I had lost my love for learning in school. That completely changed. While we were in South Africa, we studied the history of apartheid and met people of color who had spent their lives living in an unjust system. Meeting them and learning about their lives helped me see how struggles like these were playing out around our world and in our own country. A few months after I returned home, George Floyd was murdered by a policeman in Minneapolis. Because I had met so many amazing people and learned so in depth about these struggles in my semester, this event shattered my heart. I followed the BLM movement and engaged in discussions about these real injustices that were repeatedly happening in our country. These were not easy*

*or pleasant discussions, but I believed they were necessary. I based those beliefs and my newfound knowledge off what I had learned, first hand, in southern Africa with the Traveling School.*

*For four months I explored parts of the world that I never knew and learned things that cannot be taught in any textbook. I traveled around with the most inspiring group of people had ever met, who helped me take fear and turned it into confidence. The Traveling School opened my eyes to a vast world and gave me new skills and understandings, to work towards becoming the person I most want to be.*