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When I first showed up to The Traveling School, I didn't know "where I was from," so when I was asked to write an "I am from" poem as my English midterm, I was stumped. I stayed up late in my tent at night with my headlamp on writing and rewriting lines, aimlessly attempting to string together moments that defined me. I ended up turning in a poem that failed to capture who I was, because, to put it simply, I didn't know.

So where am I from? Originally I wrote: "I am from the orange stucco house with the wrought iron fence and the loud dogs." While, quite literally, this is where I am from, this building I call home has not made me "me." So once again I ask "where am I from," or rather, "what am I from?"

I am from Oakland California, the city that mixes all cultures and all people. It is a town with some of the best food I've ever tasted, from the food trucks at the museum on Fridays to the Market Hall smorgasbords. Oakland taught me about community as I joined fellow members pack into the streets to fight for justice.

I am from my messy, loud, loving family who taught me about support. Holidays with my cousins and grandparents involve loud family games and vibrant story telling. There is a spirit of adventure that runs wild in my family, that I have too. I am from the strong women in my life who tell me to never hold back, and the Ruth Bader Ginsburg quote that hangs around my neck that reminds me to "fight for the things I care about in a way that will lead others to join." Every time I wear it I think of my mother and her mother, who have accomplished so much and instilled this same perseverance in me.

I am from my education. My K-8 taught me respect over all else. This progressive community taught me love is love, no human is illegal, and we are all equally important. From a young age this school community prepared me to love those I meet, no matter how different we are. My high school, Head Royce, is where I was able to make more decisions as to who I wanted to be. Here, I learned the importance of those you choose to surround yourself with. When I picked strong and kind people, my environment was safer and more loving. I found supportive friends who understand my needs and boundaries, and I understand theirs.

I am from the Traveling School, an amazing semester abroad in Southern Africa, with hands on and experiential learning which taught me how to love learning once again. I am from science classes where we observed elephant behavior and history classes in the living room of Denis Goldberg, one of the seven Freedom Fighters, eating PBJs and talking about his life. I am from the dance parties in the desert and the off-key acapella

on our nine hour bus rides. The Traveling School taught me it's okay to not be right, and better to listen. I learned how to live with the same twelve girls and not go crazy, even in the hardest of days. I learned to carry extra batteries. I learned how to stay passionate, and how to look at issues with objectivity. I saw different perspectives — whether it was the perspective of the girl from rural Vermont, big city Detroit, or another continent entirely — and learned to value and consider these perspectives throughout every walk of life.

Each endeavor in life will shape me in a new way if I allow myself to be open to change and growth. I still don't fully know "where I am from" but I have learned to embrace the journey to get there.