

Skye Eddy, TTS34

If my blue sleeping bag could speak, I'd have to zip its mouth shut. It knows too much. It's been there with me, listening (and snuggling me) during every adventure, every escape, and every important learning experience I've had.

Lesson number #1: What you imagine, isn't always what you get.

Growing up in Jackson Hole, I've looked up at the Grand Teton almost every day of my life. At 13,776 ft, this mountain has drawn my attention and my desire to summit it since I joined the middle school climbing club and started looking at it as something that I would one day stand atop. Lucky for me, my high school climbing club partners with a mountaineering company and offers a trip for students to climb it every fall.

My freshman year, my group submitted after eighteen miles of hiking and a lumpy night of sleep in the saddle. When we reached the top, the clouds were so thick, I couldn't see past my shoes. After all those years looking up, imagining the view of the valley I call home, it was disappointing.

Sophomore year, I tried again. When we woke up at three in the morning to start our final ascent, there was lightning a mile away. We had to turn around. Sometimes nature makes decisions for you and it's important to pay attention and not risk your life for the sake of your plans. (And yes, I plan to try again!)

Lesson #2: When you discover who you are, you can feel at home anywhere.

Using that confidence, I learned to trust myself as an independent person throughout the 15 weeks that I spent in southern Africa with The Traveling School. What unfolded as I traveled through Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa changed my identity and my values.

I learned life skills like personal reflection, organization, and research. I realized how much I value an intimate learning environment with deep conversations, critical thinking, curiosity and meaningful connections. I learned that it's just as possible to learn academics while sitting on top of a sand dune with a whiteboard and notebook, as you can in a traditional classroom. I learned that I am a privileged adventurous woman who is passionate about equality, social justice, and exploring our planet.

My blue sleeping bag may have some holes covered in duct tape, but it still has a lot of wear left. Through these stages of my life, I have loved it as much as it has loved me.