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I spent a lot of my childhood in my backyard. We weren't poor, but we weren't rich by any means; we had just enough to get by. Entertainment was conjured by library books and what our hands could shape from our minds, so my life has always been full of stories. I read about all sorts of characters and lands both fictional and not. I had heard of skyscrapers and seas and stars, but I didn't get to venture too far out of my world in the backyard.

My first trip abroad finally came when I was 20 years old. I stepped onto the biggest plane I've ever seen, and half a day later I stepped off on the other side of the planet. Hong Kong was like another world entirely. I was suddenly thrust into one of the most densely populous areas on earth as the dull hum of humanity swirled to encapsulate me. As business students, we were presented with a professional quandary (the port of Hong Kong needed to increase its capacity to remain competitive in the area) and donned black suits to present solutions to high-powered executives. The dizzying foreignness of it all was terrifying, humbling, and purely fascinating.

Six months later, I went abroad once again. This time, we didn't board a sparkly underground train for our destination; we poured into a creaky old van and drove straight into the jungles of the Dominican Republic. Instead of staying on a manicured campus, we shacked up in lean-tos made of wood and tin. Instead of tours with local business leaders, we dug trenches and laid rebar. And instead of helping the port of Hong Kong to expand its capacity, we were building a house for a family that lost its matriarch too early. This mission was simultaneously so much smaller yet so much bigger than the first.

My view of the earth had been pulled and prodded and pushed so severely that it could never return back to its original shape and size – and it shouldn't. I've since returned home to that backyard, but I've been surprised by what home means to me. I've discovered that home is not a place, but is rather a feeling that one possesses. Much to my growing surprise, I have felt at home in many different places around the world. I ran in the Dominican Republic just like I run here. I hiked hills in Hong Kong just like the hills here. I laughed and cried and watched and shared there, and everywhere. We're reminded constantly of the aspects of this existence that separate us, but I couldn't help but note what it is about being profoundly, fundamentally human that should and must unite us all.

Truth be told, only one thing about that backyard has changed. Seasons have turned, leaves have sprouted and shriveled, animals have been birthed and died, as have I, and as will I. The one thing that has changed about that backyard is that the fence was knocked down somewhere along the way, and I find that I simply do not miss it.