

A cardboard box. It is composed of ordinary material and folded by the most basic of techniques. To me, this item carries more meaning.

As the son of an expatriate, a ritualistic lifestyle is unattainable and unfamiliar obstacles reveal themselves frequently. Every three years, I condense all my belongings into the confines of cartons and acknowledge that once again a chapter in my life has come to a close. Letting go is hard - to me at least. However, upon reflection, I see that this lifestyle has forged my identity and taught me valuable lessons that I cherish wholeheartedly. I hope my writing reaches someone who shares some of my struggles in need of encouragement.

My journey has taken me from a small neighborhood in Cologne - to the mountainous valley of Lucerne - to the beautiful scenery of Amsterdam - to the scorching heat of Madrid - to the bustling city of London. Moving countries at regular intervals poses several recurring challenges.

For me, the social aspect of moving countries is the most critical. Some say they will keep in touch, but I have yet to hear from them. On the contrary, several friendships have solidified in spite of a vast geographic distance. True friends reveal themselves when confronted by uncontrollable circumstances. Nevertheless, it is an objectively difficult transition from seemingly endless hours spent at the nearby basketball court to becoming merely a cluster of pixels on someone else's phone. I must remind myself that I would have never met any of these amazing people in the first place if it had not been for my continuous movement. I encountered people of various backgrounds, who are responsible for my cultural understanding. I met some of the most intelligent people, who have inspired and motivated me to work better and harder. I encountered the most entertaining individuals, with whom I could spend all night laughing and talking. I am therefore thankful, rather than resentful, of where my path has taken me. When the time comes to undergo another inevitable change in life, I will embrace new encounters with open arms.

The most valuable lesson that I learned from my ongoing journey is that home does not need to be a location that can be pinpointed. Frankly, I cannot answer the simple question "where do you come from?" to an extent that is truthful to me. Every place I have lived in has contributed a unique piece to the system that comprises my identity. This system would be incomplete without every single experience I have made throughout my life. In Switzerland, I learned to work hard to achieve my goals. In the Netherlands, I learned to become independent and to find time to do what I enjoy. In Spain, I learned to immerse

myself in unfamiliar cultures and overcome a language barrier. In the UK, I learned the importance of lifelong friendships and surrounding oneself with people that will support you unconditionally.

In the ever-changing scenery of my life, I seek a routine in festivities with those who have been the only constant in my life: my family. To me, home is simultaneously the entirety of Europe and the Christmas dinner preparations.

I want you, as the reader, to take away two things from reading this:

First, do not fear losing friends when your path in life diverts. I certainly had this fear myself several times. In hindsight, although my best friends are scattered over the globe pursuing their own ambitions, I know that I can still count on them equally as when we lived a five-minute walk from each other. Distance is not an insurmountable hurdle for true friendship. Furthermore, one can only benefit from the doors that are opened by meeting new people in unfamiliar places.

My second point is targeted at those who would consider themselves global citizens like myself. Do not marginalize yourself to one country when asked where you are from. Be proud of all the places that made you who you are today. I may have a German passport, but there is so much more to my story. My answer to where I am from is “I am from Europe” (and then I proceed to list all the places I have lived in). Sure, it may take me a little longer to introduce myself, but if anything it lets me stand out and have conversations that I would have never had otherwise.

To many, enrolling in university is a very big shift from our prior status quo. In writing this I did not intend to undermine the difficulty of change. Instead, I hope you can now view change in a new light as a necessity to drive personal development, despite the initial hurdles.

My journey has certainly been fundamental in my personal development. When it is time to unpack the cardboard box, I know in advance that a flood of influences and experiences will present themselves in the newly opened chapter of my life. What seems like an obstacle is in reality only a disguised opportunity.