I used to wish that my parents had gone with their original plan and named me Lauren. When I was a little girl, my mother and father would often tell me that I was almost named Lauren, in memory of my great grandmother Laura. A few years before I was born, my mother’s cousin named his daughter Lauren. Because my parents did not want two Laurens in the family, I was named Kenya. Many nights, I would crawl beneath my cozy burgundy sheets and stare at the ceiling fan above me. My brow would slightly furrow and I would say to myself ‘if I had a normal name my life would be brilliantly ordinary.” My views slowly began to shift in middle school.

Posters with world maps clung to the walls of Mrs. Hart’s seventh grade English classroom, and artifacts from Asia, Africa, and Latin America perched on emerald- green bookshelves. She welcomed us with a smile and began calling roll. After she called out my name, she stopped. “Kenya. That’s an interesting name…do you know what the capital of Kenya is?” inquired my teacher as she stopped pacing the floor and turned toward my direction. I sheepishly looked down at my doodle-covered desk, racking my brain for country capitals. “I’m not sure,” I finally replied. “Well that’s a shame,” she said. “Nairobi is the capital of Kenya, don’t forget that, you really should know more about your name.” She was right. What embarrassed me wasn’t the fact that I didn’t know the answer to her question, it was that I did not know the significance of my own name.

The ignorance of my own name became the catalyst for my desire to study abroad. In fact, what sparked my desire seemed like just a mundane day at my part-time job. A couple with a British accent approached my register and noticed my nametag. They inquired: “Are you from Kenya?” I intended to shrug off their inquisitiveness with a ‘no I’m not, my name just happens to be Kenya.’ They proceeded to ask: ‘Have you ever been there?’ I answered “no”. What I thought was ‘small talk’ morphed into an interesting conversation about their living in Kenya for archeological research. A few weeks later, my co-worker told me someone had left me a book at the front desk. The book was titled *The Wisdom of the Bones: In Search of Human Origins.* I opened the book and there was a picture of the authors; it was the couple that I had met a few weeks before. Inside was a note: ‘*For Kenya. We hope that you have your own African adventure someday!’* As I looked at the title of the book and embraced their words of encouragement this made me want to visit Kenya to find out who I am, not just what my parents named me.