

## I Am From

I am from the house at the end of the court that is full of farm life, delicious dairy free meals, and so much love.

From waking up to the natural alarm clock of the colorful, musical birds that reside outside my window.

From the creek that is lined with tall, fragrant eucalyptus trees, which sometimes hold a sleepy koala, and the well-used path, worn down by the neighborhood dogs and exercise junkies.

From the 3-mile walk with Reid to the church, filled with challenging but reflective conversation.

From walks to the bus stop with the occasional glance at the sidewalk to see if there is evidence of koalas in the trees.

From the stench of life in the creek, strong whiffs of eucalyptus leaves, and beautiful, unknown, fragrances from the colorful flowers and plants I pass.

From "Good mornings" and "How you goings" heard as I walk to my destination, with the occasional "G'day" that always reminds me of where I am.

I am from the Wesselings, who so graciously added another to their household and made it my home, with conversations that challenged me, laughs that comforted me, and stories that inspired me.

From Liana, who became a sister, with her strong personality that draws people to her, her ability to produce laughter from any situation, and her love for the life around her.

From the Tscharkes, who became another unforgettable family who offered me support and comfort in a place that was unknown to me, with adventures at the beach, meal experiments, shared stories that sparked heaps of laughter, old and new card games, young love, and many warm moments of sunshine and hope.

From Megan, who quickly became a very strong bond for me to lean on, with her humor and wittiness that kept me on my toes, her love for classic Aussie TV shows and adventurous American ones, her Aussie culture, which provided me with all the Aussie slang I needed to know, her passion for her work, the comfort and ease she brought to any conversation, and her ability to know when I needed a good laugh or cry.

From Pastor Reid and his family, who always let me know their door was open, who fed me with great food and conversation, who provided for me when I was in need of a good baseball movie or campfire, and who knew what it was like to live so far away from family.

From the staff at Good Shepherd who welcomed me and supported me, who always kept me occupied with big and small tasks, who allowed me to walk along with them in their faith journey while I was trying to find my own way, who shared their stories with me, and always found the time to pray for me.

From the staff at LCC who opened up and showed me their passions and hopes that they were fighting for every day.

From the Middle Eastern Women's group who had tea every Monday morning at LCC and offered me conversation and comfort on slow mornings.

From the crew on Monday nights at soup kitchen who would welcome me with a name tag and a kind smile, who showed me the same kindness and grace that they showed to the community they served every day, and who always sent me off feeling well cared for and loved.

From my fellow YAGM volunteers, especially Macy, Katie, and Joe, who knew exactly what I was going through and what I was feeling, who comforted me when I was down and celebrated with me when I was high, who gave me a shoulder to lean on but also pushed me to find that within my community, who laughed and cried with me, and who quickly became a group of people I will always have in my life.

From Kim, Henry, Silas, and Ezra, who created a home away from home as soon as I arrived in Australia, who lead me in conversations that were very meaningful to my journey, who let me go back to my childhood and play all night in the backyard, who supported me through this whole, crazy journey, and who were there when we were given the news.

I am from the kangaroo key chain that holds the keys used to lock and unlock what I called home for seven months.

From homemade, dairy free chicken schnittys accompanied with tomato sauce.

From coconut yogurt in the morning with freshly picked nectarines from the tree outside, rock melon sliced for lunch, and an Aussie BBQ filled with snags and various other meats.

From trying vegemite toast at breakfast club but deciding to save the rest for the kids to have along with their warm milo, Weet-Bix, and tomatoes.

From brekkie, teatime, lunch, teatime again, dinner, and maybe even more teatime, most of the time accompanied with biscuits and good conversation.

I am from a home that often smelled of eggs and bacon cooking on the stove top.

From a room that was set up for me as a space that I could go to read, sleep, cry, laugh, call home, recover, and relax.

From walls filled with beautiful memories that come from having a sister.

From a closet that held my belongings, which was less than I had planned to come with but became just the amount that I needed.

From a bulletin board that held pictures and postcards that were accompanied by words of peacefulness, love, and support.

From the buzz of mozzies that often joined me at night and the melodies of the birds that joined me in the morning.

I am from the green and yellow that spread across the plants I passed daily.

From the koalas that I got to cuddle and the kangaroos I got to feed.

From the kookaburras that really did sit in the gum trees and laughed as I walked by.

From the unforgettable colors that I witnessed on the wings of birds as they flew overhead.

From the spiders as big as my hand that I always had to get a better look at.

From the roses that filled the garden with fresh smells and beautiful colors.

From the fruit trees that provided, sweet, juicy snacks for us and the birds.

I am from sausage rolls, Christmas carols, and pjs on Christmas Eve.

From teasing words that signified friendship and deepening relationships.

From loving pets to welcomed me with many kisses.

From sharing in the attraction to the accent of the other.

From Abbie, who shared her passions and fears with me while we drove to enjoy the afternoon hanging out with some sweet girls.

From Jacqui and Lexi, who brightened my Thursday afternoons with great conversation, many giggles, and exciting milestones.

I am from enjoying morning tea with a group of women who now call a new country home, the beauty of a smile, and the support of individuals who know what it's like to be so far from home.

From watching the World Series in the church office and many curious questions about the sport.

From "no worries mate", new words with familiar meaning that were learned every day, and words that quickly became part of my vocabulary.

From the relaxed and comforting nature of this country and the people, which came through in the everyday language.

I am from the congregation of Good Shepherd, who introduced me to worship services that included a live band, power points with the shared words of the service, and many laughs.

From individuals who shared their faith journey with me and allowed me to follow and share at my own pace.

I am from amateur footy games as an introduction to the popular Australian sport.

From women's soccer games to celebrate equal pay and well-known names within the beautiful game.

From nights watching touch footy and the memories they sent me home with.

From sausage sizzles and community-based meals that created many different spaces of support for me.

From Christmas Day meals with welcoming families and more sweat than I am used to on a day that is usually spent bundled up under warm blankets and fuzzy socks.

From pizza research at fun new restaurants and new friends' homes.

From warm nights at baseball games after days at the beach and nights spent dancing to well-loved tunes.

From the shared traditions of Halloween and Thanksgiving and the 5 am wake up call to make fresh cinnamon rolls for Christmas morning.

From tough conversations about life and culture.

From the times at the beach spent sharing memories, jokes, and heaps of popcorn.

From my first Australian sunburn and the relief of aloe vera.

From the week I spent camping with a group of 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls where I was constantly blown away by their courage as they overcame obstacle after obstacle, all while encouraging each other.

I am from the rolling hills of the wineries and the nights spent outside under the stars.

From the moments shared with my cohort, exploring what Australia meant to each of us and the memories made with new friends I will never forget.

From the memories of Australia that I am physically and emotionally marked with.