I remember the first time I left my parents for a significant amount of time and really felt it. As part of a school trip for world history, a group of junior year high school students and I traveled with a handful of teacher “group leaders”. The trip lasted 10 days or so, visiting historical WWI and WWII sites from Paris to Vienna. Even upon leaving from the SFO airport to our first destination in France, I knew this trip would be one that I would never forget.

Before leaving, my parents gave me a heartfelt goodbye, wishing me well and reminding me to always keep my passport. They had given me a necklace pouch to hold it in, and I was to make sure no one could steal it out of my backpack or pocket. They’d also warned me of pickpockets trying to prey on unsuspecting tourists, and apparently a real American passport is worth quite a bit to some people. So before leaving anywhere, I always made sure to check my chest and therefore my passport.

After a wonderful trip to Paris and Versailles, I embarked on an overnight train to Munich, Germany. I was brimming with excitement and anticipation for the adventure ahead, having dreamt of this trip for months. As the rhythmic bumping of the train lulled me to sleep, I couldn't wait to explore the charming streets of Munich and soak up the city's rich history and culture. However, my enthusiasm was short-lived as I woke up in the middle of the night drenched in sweat. The cozy compartment had turned into a hot and stuffy room with four teenage boys, and my passport necklace was cutting into my neck. I put my passport in the helpful cubby next to me, opened the window, and went back to sleep.

The next morning, I woke up early to the sun shining through the window I had left open the night before. I was sleeping on the bottom bunk bed, and I noticed that the top bunk could flip down, converting the two beds into a sort of couch. What I didn't realize at the time was that the top bunk covered the helpful cubby where I had placed my passport the night before. As our group was deboarding the train, I realized with a sinking feeling that my passport was missing. I had left it in the cubby, covered by that top bunk.

We were on a tight schedule, so our trip guide rushed us to our bus. As we waited for the other half of our group to deboard the other train, I hopelessly checked for my passport; feeling emptiness in more ways than one. I immediately told our group leader what had happened, and he urged me to go back to the train before it left to be cleaned. I left my bags with the group and ran back to the train, watching it start to move just as I reached the top of the stairs. I had lost my passport, not even having it stolen but losing it myself. It was locked under the back of a bunk bed.

Feeling dejected, I explained that I had failed the teacher in charge, who in turn explained it to our guide. The guide made some calls and informed me that the right people were on the lookout for it, but there were no guarantees. Our plan was to keep our hopes up for a call that it had been found. We headed to our first destination in Germany, relieved to receive a call that my passport had indeed been turned in. However, the lost and found office was located at another train station, which meant we had to take another train to retrieve it.

As we hopped from train to train, passing by everyday Germans on their way to work, I heard more German than I ever had before. When Germans said "thank you" in German, it sounded like "danka" and almost sounded like an English "thank you." Finally, we arrived at the lost and found office at the train station where our train had been cleaned. The kind lady at the desk only spoke German, but with the help of our guide, I was able to prove my identity and finally get my hands back on my passport. With a huge smile on my face and relief in my heart, we headed back to our group to explore Munich. I vowed never to lose my passport again and never again to need my parents' reminder to keep my passport close.