

The End is Nigh: Live a Little

By Aidan Foss

When I was younger, I found the apocalyptic stories from texts like the Bible and the Torah to be downright silly. In my mind, there was no way things like floods that would wipe away all life or plagues that would destroy civilizations could ever happen. This seems like a logical train of thought to have and is probably the best course of action not to drive yourself absolutely insane. That being said, I couldn't have been more wrong. In my lifetime I have witnessed floods that have destroyed cities, fires that have burned hundreds of acres of forests, and diseases that have spread to thousands worldwide. The fact of the matter is, the apocalypse has already started and it has been going on for quite some time now.

A person living in our modern era might pause and say: "Wait a minute, I have heard all of this before!" They would be absolutely right. It is nearly impossible to avoid hearing this doom and gloom echoed by politicians, news outlets, family members, and friends. Even someone who detaches themselves completely from society and moves up into the mountains would not be truly free from the visible effects of climate change. So how do you find happiness, find love, find hope, during this time of crisis? The answer may seem obvious, simplistic even, but that is entirely the point. To overcome the stress and worry of the world around you, you must live a little.



My journey to the land of fire and ice was far from easy. Less than a week from departure, I had been at the lowest of my low points in life. I had lost a three-year relationship, was going through serious physical and mental health issues, and was struggling with life in general. At one point I even thought about not going so I could focus on my life back home. It was at this point that I was given the very first lesson of my journey, which came from my close friends during one of our coffee meet-ups. They told me: “If you let the pain you feel in the present overwhelm the possibility of future happiness, you will never forgive yourself.” Those words became the foundation of my trip and stayed with me through every lesson I learned.

There is nothing that I could do to fully prepare myself for the realities of this trip. Every video I watched and every book I read just created more questions than I received answers to. That is of course another fundamental lesson when it comes to living in our ever-changing world,

where life as we know it seems as if it is constantly under threat. Sometimes, questions do not need to have answers, you do not even need to ask them. That very first breath of Icelandic air should have been a calming feeling, a sense of relief that I had finally made it to the place I had dreamed of coming to for weeks on end; however, I felt empty. I could not conjure up an emotion to feel. I stood there, feeling the breeze around me and the light mist of the rain touch my skin and it was as if I had become nothing more than a shell.



How do I move forward? That is the first question that I asked myself while on the bus ride to Start Hostel. I came on this adventure still holding onto these fragments of the past, my ex-partner, my struggles with losing friends, things I simply could not change even if I wanted to. Part of the process of learning to find hope is first letting go of false hopes. This is also the first step towards a brighter future when it comes to climate change. We have already damaged the world in ways that are near irreversible. Our goal now is not to reminisce about the world we once had, but rather to shape the world we have now into what we want.

The first few days of the trip were a whirlwind of emotions and thoughts. It was like drinking in Iceland straight from a fire hose. On the third day, I completely lost my voice. At first, this was devastating. Normally, I consider myself to be very talkative and enjoy conversing with others. However, this did allow me to do something I had not done properly in a long time, listen. I listened to the stories told by our trusty guide Oli, to my peers whose insights brought more than my voice alone ever could have, and to the world around me, which was filled with the songs and sounds of a place that had once only existed in my imagination. Learning to listen is an important part of living life and finding hope in climate change. If I were to just go forward with my life, spouting the same information I already knew, would I really be growing as a person?

I found a strange comfort in my own silence. Being unable to talk left my mind and heart open to feeling things differently. When every word that I spoke was strained you best believe I made sure what I said mattered. I am most certainly not a scientist or a politician, but I learned something on this trip that some leaders of our world still seem to lack. When we take the time to listen to others instead of just talking to talk, we grow, we feel.



During my time in the beautiful city of Reykjavik, I decided to get a tattoo. This may seem like a spontaneous decision of an immature young adult; however, there was more to this choice than just getting a tattoo for the heck of it. Every tattoo is a connection, a memory. These are stories carved into the skin. They aren't just the story of the person getting tattooed, they are the story of the artist as well. The artist who did my tattoo was a middle-aged woman from Germany who had moved to Iceland to be with her husband. Like me, she found some of the lifestyle choices made by the Icelanders to be a tad difficult to work with. We were both strangers in a strange land in which the mentality that things will happen when they are meant to happen and that there is no use in stressing was a foreign concept to both of us. Despite the difficulties she faced, she cared deeply about the quality of her work and her job in general. Seeing people who are passionate about their lives and enjoy what they do gives me hope for the

future of the world. Change requires passion, especially when it comes to our climate crisis. That tattoo is a reminder that there is still passion left in the world and that there are people who do care about the world around them and are actively trying to make it a better place. There is an aspect to climate change that I think is often overlooked, that being the people. The news bombards us with numbers and statistics that to the average person mean nothing. The real connections happen between people who can share their stories and lives with each other. When we take a chance, move outside of our comfort zones, live a little, sometimes we discover new connections, ideas, and stories that can change the world.



Few moments on this trip had the same lasting emotional impact on me as our visit to Þingvellir. Before coming on the trip, I was already familiar with some of the history surrounding Iceland, specifically when it came to the information contained in the Icelandic Sagas. It is one thing to read about the history of a nation, but it is entirely another thing to experience it and see it firsthand. History in Iceland is tied directly to the land on which it takes place. For example, some of the most famous sagas have parts that take place in Þingvellir. The realization dawned on me while there that these areas that are vital to the history of Iceland are

under threat from the effects of climate change. It is terrifying to think that when we are destroying the land around us we are also destroying our history. When that history is destroyed we can not learn from the lessons of our past to make a better future. Iceland has been living in its own kind of apocalypse since people settled on the island. With the shifting of tectonic plates, earthquakes, and frequent volcanoes, Icelanders have watched their natural history melt and crack before their eyes.

Despite all this, Icelanders seem to be filled with hope and happiness. Their weather is arguably bleak, the trees are more like shrubs, and some areas covered in volcanic ash are downright inhospitable. How is it possible that they can be so happy? Everyone can take a guess and come up with a different answer, but I think I have narrowed it down to one phrase that seems to be the backbone of Icelandic society; Þetta reddast. When translated into English this means: "It will all work out okay." This attitude might be annoying for German tattoo artists who are frustrated with their shop co-owners for not buying more paper towels, but for the general public, this seems to be their light in the dark. When I found myself stressing about getting to the next thing or worrying about life back at home while on the trip I thought back to this saying and knew deep down that it was the truth.



I came on this trip as someone who was at their worst, someone who had little left to give to the world. I realized over the course of the journey that giving is not always the primary purpose in life. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is simply live. Even in the face of climate change, where there seems to be another problem every day that threatens our very existence, we must live. Choosing not to live and to seek happiness and passion is how we lose ourselves. The fact of the matter is that we can not go back to the way things were, with both climate change and with life in general. The boats and bridges of the past have long been burned by the fires of our personal apocalypses. There is nowhere to go now but forward and on with life. So when people ask me now, “How do I find hope?” I will give them this simple answer.

Live a little.