

Endurance and Hope: A Letter Home

By Halle Farnsworth

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Hi Loser,

I am writing from the floor of my bedroom. My room looks like a clothing bomb went off. I never unpacked all my stuff from New York on top of moving into this place. The whole trip to Iceland feels like a fever dream. People do not talk enough about the adjustment period of returning home after a long trip. You have to visit this country once you have settled in Sweden. You should really look into the possible perks of living in Scandinavia for travel and work once you get permanent residency in a few years. Perhaps if the whole teaching gig doesn't work out, you just commit to becoming a sheep farmer. There are so many sheep in Iceland. I would not be surprised if the sheep outnumber the Icelandic population. The farmers seem to have finished the lambing season during our visit. It is dozens of black and white cotton balls in the fields as you drive along.



People are right when they say that the landscape of Iceland is unique and just breathtaking. When we went to Sweden last year, I could not stop thinking about how if you remove the colorful buildings and the bridges into the towns, Sweden looks remarkably like Maine. Iceland is different in many ways. The birds sing different songs. There are no mosquitos flying into your eyes. The weather was overcast. The sun peeks through for a couple of hours each day. Often, there are no trees to shield you away from the sun's rays. The rays felt so blinding that perhaps

Mom was correct about the allegations of me becoming a mole. There are few tall trees in Iceland. Most of the tall trees are imports. One of our drivers joked that if you ever get lost in the woods in Iceland, you just have to stand up. I struggle to imagine a life without trees surrounding me. I think all of the brown needles and sap from the pines in the yard have made their way into my blood. Every sunset was hidden away from the house. Iceland must have the clearest sunsets. The whole class was about finding hope during the climate crisis. We were often asked to think

about the human relationship to the environment. There were a lot of bus rides, so I had a lot of time for my thoughts.

I thought about how Icelanders used driftwood or imported wood to build their homes. Always accepting the opportunities offered by the sea, sky, and land. How the wood has served as structural support for generations. It is like the creaky floorboards in our own room. The boards harvested from the trees on Grammy and Papa's land. The daily hopscotch in the mornings to avoid the moans and groans of the floor so I wouldn't wake you. Those pieces of dead wood have survived the deaths of grandparents and the endings of childhood. One of the readings for the class spoke about how the Earth will continue to persist past human existence. Even after we have killed and destroyed the environment, life will likely continue.



I hope those pieces of wood floor exist past our family's custodianship. It will support the next custodians of the home. The trees for the boards died a lifetime ago, but the wooden boards will breathe and creak for a new pair of tiny feet.

I thought about the time Mom kicked us out of the house. She was huffing and puffing about how we needed to go out and touch some grass. We were instructed to not show up at the door for at least an hour. She did the usual rant about how she always played outside with her siblings at our age, which by the way is easy when you have five siblings and the Internet does not exist. You marched into the woods and I was your reluctant sidekick. We stopped in front of a random tree. You boldly claimed that you could talk to the trees, and the trees spoke to you. All of a sudden in my mind, you had turned into a yellow furry creature resembling the Lorax and grew two heads. I was at the age where Santa stopped visiting, and the recession forced the Tooth Fairy out of business. Still, you dragged me from pine to pine. You insisted that I wasn't listening enough to the tree. The trees never spoke to me. I know in hindsight that the event was just a game to pass the time. Yet, I could not help but feel a bit disappointed that the trees did not speak to me. Those silent deaths of childhood magic.

I let the disappointment and anxiety fester into bitterness toward the world as we got older. In 6th grade, I laid in bed and waited for the sun to explode when midnight brought in the 2012 New Year. A Mayan apocalypse that never occurred, and the Earth kept turning. One apocalypse ended and the next one commenced. The deadline is 2050 to stop Earth's temperature from



rising. The name of this apocalypse is climate change. There is little to nothing a person can do to stop this apocalypse.

Well according to every traditional media outlet at the time, there is little impact a person can do. It would take mass international effort by governments and corporations to mitigate the effects of climate change. People can not move mountains or change the currents of the ocean. I carried doubts and insecurities about what a single person can achieve against climate change with me to Iceland.

During the trip, my class had a free day in Reykjavik. By this point of the trip, I still found myself doubting the future of climate change. We had seen volcanoes,

glacial waters, and fault lines. Yet, all those natural wonders did little to soothe my worries. A White Lives Matter sticker on an exit sign at the University we were touring served as a reminder of the harsh realities of the world. Following the tour, we had about a 20-minute walk to the center of the city. On a whim, a small group of us ended up wandering into the woods for an hour. The woods turned out to be a small trail system. It was like being teleported back to Maine. An isolated little world in the middle of concrete. There was an abandoned well area that with no doubt is a drunk spot for young people. We climbed up stone walls that led to a clearing filled with old concrete. There were tall pines everywhere. It felt like an actual forest. We were scrambling up rocks covered in slippery pine needles. If you walked far enough, you can see the center of Reykjavik peeping through the branches. We stood on top of a large rock like kings on a mountain. An indescribable feeling cradled me at the moment. The emotion was not cataclysmic. Rather, I just let myself be simply swayed and washed by the moment. While I was standing there in those woods on this small island, where the Earth's fault lines break away, the trees finally spoke to me. It took looking out to the world from a bird's eye view, but at that moment, I understood why you decided to move away.

The Icelandic people carry a certain optimism with them that is lacking in American media. Through the bluntness and dry humor, the people we met are enthusiastic in their belief about the future of the world. The Icelandic culture can be described through the expression *Petta reddast*. It will all work out in the end. It does not mean one just lies in the middle of the train tracks, waiting for death to pull in. Rather it speaks to the endurance of Icelanders and life. Humans have a funny way of persisting despite the odds. After that wander through the woods, the small group of us stumbled upon the backfield of the Perlan Museum. Within this natural history museum, there is a little plaque dedicated to a dead glacier and an unknown future. The author of the plaque, who we had met the day prior coincidentally, wrote, "... This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it".



I do not have potential solutions for the climate crisis. I know, 10 days of traveling and gallivanting around Iceland just to return with no answers. There is no immediate solution to climate change. Half of the battle is to have people give acknowledgment of the dangers of climate change. Maybe part of the solution is a plaque for every snow day lost, every tree cut, and every failed lobster catch. I return to Maine with greater gratitude for our bright stars and lush lands. More importantly, I carry the determination to shake off some of my

inner pessimism. A reminder of *Petta reddast* because to give up on climate change is to give up on whole generations before allowing them a chance to experience the world. Our generation and the next will be the ones who further the work of harnessing renewable energy and sustainable practices. We will mourn the losses and celebrate the gains.

The defining years of my childhood were the five years where it was just you, me, and Mom in that leaky old house on 3 acres of woods. Before Spencer came into the picture. Before John moved. Those years of drifting back and forth between houses. They are the worst and best years of my life. Mom and Grammy made me love nature, but you helped make nature seem magical.

On a selfish level, I want you to stay in Maine. Then I consider your brains and patience. While I stood in that clearing overlooking the city of Reykjavik, the idea of holding you back from Sweden seemed foolish. There is a whole world to experience beyond Maine. I thought of the whole generation of students you will guide and teach as you did with me. How you will have willing students to teach calculus to, unlike 10-year-old me. You are part of the acknowledgment and solution towards climate change. Fostering those teenagers towards a love for learning and pushing boundaries. I can not wait to hear about how you will educate those young Swedish minds. I know I do not say this enough, but I am so fortunate to be your sister Jake.

Do fully expect to be used as a scapegoat by me for the family gatherings,
Halle