

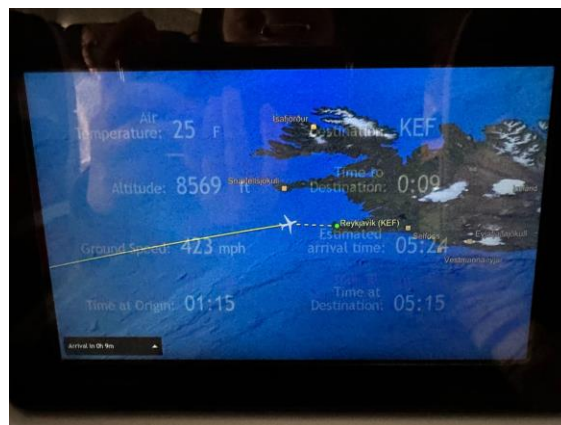
# Shreds of Hope

By Meagan Ladner

Saturday 27 May, 2023

On this sunny Saturday, thirteen of my classmates and I set off on the journey of a lifetime to Iceland with the goal of finding hope during a time of climate change. As I got on the bus that would bring us to Boston I deemed this nearly impossible. How could we find hope in a time like this? Our world, but specifically our country, is so split on this concept that it seems change which is worthy of something is far from our reach. But I was along for the ride, keeping my thoughts to myself wondering what this trip might have to offer me.

Once at the airport we all patiently awaited to board our flight getting to know each other while doing so. Talks of family, likes and dislikes, relationships, and past experiences were had. We then boarded the plane where I was seated next to a girl I only knew slightly and one I did not know at all. We flew through the night, time traveling to our destination, in the most uncomfortable seats any of us had ever sat in. To say we were tired was an understatement.



Sunday 28 May, 2023

Upon our arrival in Iceland we were greeted by a big burly man with a kind heart who was to take us to our accommodations at the Start Hostel. On the ride I noticed how dark and barren this place was. It was cloudy and raining, putting a gray hue over the land as far as I could see. We drove up a long entryway to a flat area filled with buildings and small little roads between them. Immediately this place felt eerie to me. Why were we so isolated from everything else? Once there we had our first meal in Iceland, just a small breakfast buffet, nothing special, but we were all just happy to have food in our stomachs. A couple hours later we checked into our rooms, beginning to learn how to live with new people for the next nine days.

After some rest we were picked up by Oli, our tour guide, and taken to a classroom for an introductory presentation. Oli was a very kind and knowledgeable man, it seemed he knew just about everything about anything. But he was also laid back, offering one of my classmates to drive his van upon meeting him, something that would never happen in the United States. Oli explained that we were on what used to be a United States military base which validated the initial eerie sensation our location gave me. I now understood it was set up to be isolated on purpose. During this presentation, someone in the group asked if children in Iceland fear climate change and Oli seemed perplexed by this question. As he was thinking about his answer we sat around a conference room table filled with half-eaten Subway sandwiches and warm glasses of water wondering what words might come out of his mouth next. His response was in the form of a question, asking if children in America are really that fearful of climate change, seeming as though this is not something of worry to them here. I believe for many of us this was a foreign concept, to not have this in the back of our minds, or at least to me it was. I wondered how the future of our world could possibly not be concerned with this matter. Oli continued with the

presentation stating with tears in his eyes that the puffin population in Iceland has decreased seventy percent because ocean waters are warming causing the fish they eat to no longer be able to survive in these waters which has caused the puffin to starve and die.

There goes any hope I had left.



Monday 29 May, 2023

Today we went exploring and learned a lot about the past and present of Iceland. Getting off of the old military base and seeing the natural landscape of the country was a breath of fresh air. I was amazed at all of the different sights there are to see and how close together they are. First we went to Hafnir, a small town where one of the biggest houses during settlement was located. When stepping off the bus here I was immediately reminded of home when I smelled the salt air. It was almost as if it was a reflex, my body thought of Maine before my mind told me I was in Iceland. I was overjoyed to turn around and see a tabby cat trotting towards me just as mine does at home. Animals bring me so much happiness and seeing this cat made me forget about how cold I was for a few minutes. Oli then told us of how the country is splitting in two because the line between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates runs through Iceland.

We got to see the site where this is happening and it filled me with many different emotions. At first I was mind blown that this is happening and that the country has already split so much that we could walk in it. It was a very pretty place with rocks towering over both sides of me while I was standing on black sand which is ground up remnants of these rocks. Then I realized how sad this was. The country is literally splitting into two. I began wondering how long it will take for this to happen and what Iceland will do when they are no longer one. My happiness from the morning was slowly depleting.

After lunch we went on a short hike to the eruption site of the Geldingadalir volcano which erupted in 2021. Seeing all the basalt was amazing. I never knew rocks could be so pretty. Oli taught us about how the gasses escaping through the porous rock stained it different colors. I was astonished that this happens completely naturally. It is amazing what the earth does all on its own. This beauty caused me to be even more appreciative of our world and what it does for us. Although so many negative things are happening to our earth right now, the slightest bit of hope was brought back to me knowing the earth knows what to do to adjust to changes without anyone telling it to do so, just as a mother's body knows how to nurture a baby in her womb.



Tuesday 30 May, 2023

Today was a very busy day. We started the morning driving around Reykjavik getting our bearings while Oli explained to us everything we were seeing. We then went to the Settlement Museum and were able to see what is believed to be one of the oldest long houses in Iceland. Then came lunch at the food hall followed by the Open Air museum where we learned about religion in Iceland. Our group was fortunate enough to meet author Andri Magnason and listen to him tell his story. We crammed into his half-finished studio, some of us squished together on a couch made for four, but we fit six. He spoke about the time he wrote a book of poetry about the popular grocery store chain, Bonus that was sold in their stores. He explained that he was essentially making fun of them but they thought it was great because it would bring in more money. Although this was a light-hearted piece, some of his work is heavier. Some of his pieces address climate change but in a way that is easy for anyone to understand. This gives me hope for the future because if society can just take the time to read these stories, maybe they will understand the significance of the situation and implement changes in their lives.

As I was sitting on the bus today I remembered something Oli said earlier in the trip. While we were sitting on the bus, looking out the window at the mountains while the sun was trying to come out, he took off his worn John Deere baseball cap, brushed his hands through his hair, and told us that he has hope for our future and that he is not worried about climate change, he is optimistic. This struck me. Oli would often take time to convey his words to us, but in this moment, he took no time at all. He knew exactly what he wanted to say. I began to think that if this man who is much more knowledgeable than I am has hope for our future, then so should I.

This was a major turning point for me when I started finding hope again and starting looking at things from a different perspective, Oli's perspective.



Wednesday 31 May, 2023

This morning we visited Reykjavik University and met many brilliant professors. The work being done at this university has the potential to change our future. Basalt is being turned into rods and mats which is just truly amazing. Using this natural resource could drastically cut down the amount of plastic used. I am grateful that there are people out there who think outside of the box and are creative enough to make stuff like this work because it may be used worldwide someday. These professors share Oli's mindset as it seems most Icelanders do. Maybe we have it all wrong in the United States? Maybe we should try to use what we have to reduce climate change instead of trying to invent new things to fight it. Maybe we should share the hope that Icelanders embody when it comes to facing climate change instead of turning our heads and acting like it does not exist.

The rest of our day was spent exploring the picturesque city of Reykjavik. We visited one of two catholic churches in the country, shopped for souvenirs, and ate lots of food. Lots of

memories were made with new friends but also realizations with myself about how our future could change for the better. These are moments I will never forget.



Sunday 4 June, 2023

Today was our last full day in Iceland. We explored lots of waterfalls and got to experience the black sand beach. Walking behind waterfalls and getting soaked is not usually something I would enjoy but I made myself do it because I knew it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and I am glad I did. Watching seagulls dip into the water and soar away made me feel like I was in a Disney movie. Seeing a double rainbow over a waterfall overlooking mountains and bright green grass being grazed by sheep put me in *The Sound of Music*. It was like a fairytale. How lucky are the people that get to live this every day? I think that may be why Icelanders are so hopeful about climate change. They get to live amongst these natural wonders that some can only dream of seeing. I think their hope should be an inspiration to the United States and the rest of the world during this time. Even though we may not have all the gorgeous scenery, we can find beauty in what we have, and then we will be able to find hope as a whole. This trip has allowed me to reflect on my thoughts about climate change and gain a new perspective by learning through

others and listening to their thoughts and stories. Now I understand why the children of Iceland are not concerned for their future, they have hope for what is to come.

