

A Narrative Picture Collage of Iceland

By Phoebe Elliott

"A Journey to Far Away"



30,000 feet above the Atlantic Ocean

*My stomach does a backflip as gravity pulls it back to the Earth, but my heart longs to soar
The wind pulls me higher and higher until I am above the clouds
Free as a bird, but trapped in the barred confines of reality
Left with nothing but my thoughts and imagination of a world cleared from impurities, haze, and
a thick polluting fog
Caused by a seemingly uncaring race without the knowledge to fix it
Floating across an ocean to find answers and tangible hope*

Itching to see the world, travel, and experience something more, I traveled to Iceland to study life, human existence, and myself. The more I learn, the more I question and search for answers. Living in a rapidly warming and changing world, we are in need of solutions, but most of all, hope.

Leaving home was hard for me. Sure I was excited because I have never done anything like this, but I was leaving my family who was struggling to find hope for themselves with having to take care of my sick grandparents. I left home with anxious thoughts of what was going to happen if I was in a different country and my grandfather died. He has stage four kidney cancer that has rapidly spread to his lungs. This has taken its toll on my family and my grandmother who also has dementia. I felt incredibly guilty leaving my family to bear this burden alone while I traveled. I carried the stress and anxiety of this situation with me the entire trip, on the verge of a breakdown every day. It felt like I was going to a country with so much hope, but there was no hope back home. Still, I got myself on the plane because I owed it to myself and my family to do something worthwhile. We are in desperate need of a light at the end of this seemingly endless tunnel.

“One of Many in This Big World “



Reykjanes Peninsula

*Next to an endless ocean, I have never felt smaller
Ready to finish a seemingly losing battle
I am tired and prepared to throw in the towel
But I am reminded of the sunshine and the flowers that grow
A friend joins in my sorrow and I am reminded that I am not alone
But together we are strong and ready to face the unknown*

Standing on the oceanside of the Reykjanes Peninsula, I realized how small I was in this big world. My life is just one among billions. Here, I questioned how much my actions and feelings really mattered in the vast scheme of things. I thought about how many others were losing loved ones like I am and how many others are dealing with issues much bigger than mine. I questioned how much my actions really matter and if they were really ever going to make a difference.

When reading John Green's book *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, he kept saying that the Earth was going to die anyway, and eventually everything was going to come to an end but the Earth would evidently outlast any of us. Well, if that is true, what does it matter if I ride my bike instead of driving to work in an effort to lower emissions? It might just make me late to work. In the grand scheme of things, does any of this matter?

I am not a pessimist, in fact I heard somewhere that it takes more effort to be negative and frown all day than it does to smile. So being on this coastline where it felt like home to be back on the ocean, I forced myself to take a deep breath and look at things from a different perspective. So what if what I do doesn't end up changing the world, at least I tried to do something.

Our other trip leaders and guests spoke endlessly about how important it is to educate ourselves and the people around us. Without understanding, we continue to fall into a pit of statistics like Alice on her way to Wonderland, never really grasping anything to hold onto and losing all meaning of time and space. Being in Iceland has allowed us to learn from others and gather information so we might bring it home and teach our communities, to share our stories in a comparable way.

“Water Erodes in Order to Create Change”



Hraunfossar Waterfalls

*Stagnant water sits and collects disease and never strives toward its goals
Fluid water is constantly changing itself and the earth it touches
It erodes, molds, and constructs its own environment in which it will thrive in
Through deconstruction and devastation, space is made for beauty and growth
For without change there is no room for rebirth
Dangerous though water is, it is also elegant and serene*

Elements require balance. With too much or too little water, life will cease to exist. Whether there is a space for it or not, water chooses its own path. We too have the ability to choose the life we want to live, to take control of today in order to ensure a better tomorrow. Iceland has taught me that the way we are living now, is not the only option. As we live in darkness and despair for our drastically changing and warming planet, there is hope in us.

After visiting this river on the Hraunfossar Falls and seeing the power that water has made to change this world, I believe that we too can make a difference. Chemically, water is made up of a collection of molecules, two Hydrogen and one Oxygen. They are two of the most common elements in nature but they also make up you and me. If two simple elements can bond together to mold the world, why can't we? Just as one single water molecule will have little impact on the world, when others gather with it change can happen. Change is difficult and painful, it is not easy or fast, but one day it may make all the difference.

“Without Destruction, There is no Beauty”



Reynisfjara Beach

*I am drawn to the ebb and flow of the ocean like a moth to the flame
The black of the sand contrasts the foggy blue and white of the water so I can't look away
I long for a hot sun to break through the darkness but never comes
Slowly I am eroding like the rocks on the beach, losing parts of myself each wave at a time
The change is painful but I am reminded of joy that comes in the morning with each coming
sunrise*

Life comes in waves; but lately it feels like I have been swept out with the tide and simply floating along. Sometimes I am able to catch a breath and get my head above the water to enjoy life for a little while, but other times I feel like I am caught in a riptide and drowning. Being at Reynisfjara Beach reminded me that the tide ebbs and flows, it doesn't stay in one spot for too long and the hard moments pass. I needed this reassurance as I sat on the beach and just breathed, inhaling for eight seconds, holding, and slowly releasing for another eight seconds. I needed a reset, a break from life as I closed my eyes and just listened to the coming and going waves.

The Icelandic motto that we all learned to love and hate at some point along the trip is *Petta Reddast*. It means it's all going to work out in the end. Initially, this was a very hard and annoying concept for me to grasp. I usually like to stick to a schedule and enjoy my routine, but I quickly realized that this is not how Icelanders worked. I needed to relax and move like the ocean, go with the flow.

“Perspective”



Dyrhólaey

*Take a step back and see life from a different perspective
Change your point of view in order to find the truth, happiness, and empathy in this harsh world
Tell your story to those who will listen and especially to those who don't want to
Stay compassionate and kind to those who do not understand
Teach your truth so the world can learn and is given an opportunity to be better*

Being in Iceland gave me a new perspective. Nature is a powerful force, but so can we also be. Lately, it feels like my nerves, emotions, and feelings have been controlling my life. I am constantly on the verge of tears, I can never fully explain the way I am feeling, and even though my body is going about life, my mind is somewhere else. Even while writing this piece, my mind is scattered and nothing feels cohesive. This trip allowed me to step away from my everyday routine, come out of my comfort zone, and look at things differently.

Since being back home, nothing has felt the same. This adventure to Iceland was a life changing learning experience that left me questioning the way I live, attack problems, and search for solutions. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that not everyone will care as much as we do but they still need to understand what is happening. When we work together, we are a force to be reckoned with. Hagrid once said, “What’s comin’ will come, and we’ll meet it when it does.” Petta Reddast.

“Bridging Between Worlds”



Keflavik Airport

*Bridges burn, flood, and collapse, but they also heal, mend, and repair
The fires built to burn bridges will only light the path toward truth
A sturdy bridge across treacherous waters and dangerous winds provides safe passage
Traveling across bridges allow voyagers to tell both sides of the story
From bank to bank, truths are connected by arches
We are never met with the end of the road, there is always another bridge to be built*

Through life, we build bridges over water, through communities, relationships, and throughout time. We face, and eventually cross every bridge we come to. Sometimes the bridge feels too narrow and unstable to pass and it is wise to have a lifeboat on standby, but no matter how scary the troll under the bridge is, we persist and overcome.

Traveling abroad is like crossing a bridge that you can't see the other side of. There may be trolls hiding underneath waiting to block your path and ask you riddles, but you also have a team traveling with you to overcome these challenges and learn with you.

After returning home from Iceland, I feel like I am the bridge between two worlds. On one side you have a hopeful Iceland rooting for America, full of hope; and on the other side is America, still confused, flustered from being bombarded with useless statistics, and just trying to create a liveable space. Therefore, it is my pleasure to come back from a faraway land with good news for America, it is okay, we can do this. Take a deep breath, because even though it might sound scary, and it can be sometimes, if we stick together and share our stories, we can make a difference.