

TERRA INCOGNITA: A Memoir About My Study Abroad Trip to Scotland

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Academic Treatise

In the spring of 2020, I studied abroad in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh. Even before I went to Scotland, I knew I wanted to write a thesis about the country, its history, and its culture. I didn't know what that thesis would look like—a traditional research thesis, or a set of short stories, or a nonfiction creative writing piece—but I knew I was going to write about Scotland in some way or another. I went hoping to collect material for my thesis, whatever its form might be. I hoped to learn something about Scotland and the world that I could turn into a meaningful piece of writing.

If I had to sum up the semester in a word, that word would be “unexpected.” Before I arrived in Scotland, I had certain ideas about how the semester would go. I would be there for five months, taking classes in Scottish history and culture, traveling all over Scotland and Europe, and making friends with people all over the world. I would focus mainly on my classes in the first half of the semester, then spend my two weeks of spring break in April traipsing across the Scottish landscape, through historic cities and wild natural wonders, visiting all the places I'd learned about in class. As it turned out, there was a professor strike for three weeks in the middle of the semester, disrupting my classes and giving me more time to explore Edinburgh. Then there was the pandemic, which cut my semester abroad in half, forcing me to come home sooner than expected and to leave many things undone.

I was worried that all those disruptions would mean that I wouldn't have enough material to write about. When I sat down afterwards, however, I realized that the length of time I had spent in Edinburgh didn't matter. Even in the two and a half months I spent there, I had met so many people, visited so many places, and been challenged in so many unexpected ways. My experiences in Scotland reshaped the way I viewed reality. Even the smallest experiences in

Scotland, such as snippets of conversation overheard in a park, triggered ideas that I had never had before. I was shocked by how much I had learned in Scotland, and how much I had to say about it all, even though I had only been there for a short time.

Why Scotland?

I have been interested in Scotland for as long as I can remember. I could blame the fascination on the kilted bagpiper figurine that sits on my family's mantelpiece, or on my dad's claims about our Scottish ancestry, or on the early *James Bond* films starring Sean Connery. For a large part of my life, this was an idle fascination, spurred on by a trip my family took there when I was in high school. I simply wanted to go back and to see more of the country.

My academic interest in the country arose my first semester at the University of Texas, and has persisted ever since. That semester, I took a Plan II seminar called Introduction to British Studies, taught by Dr. Samuel Baker (who years later became my second reader for this project). In this class, we read several works of English, Scottish, and Irish literature, exploring the culture of the British Isles through these writings. My favorite work by far was a set of poems called the Ossian cycle. They were a collection of fragments and an epic narrated by a Scottish Gaelic bard named Ossian, written in an ancient manuscript in Scottish Gaelic. A Scotsman named James Macpherson allegedly found the manuscript on a trip through his native Scottish Highlands. He translated the poems into English and published them for the world to enjoy. Before these poems, no one paid any attention to literature of the Scottish Gaels, who seemed to be a primitive and backwards people. James Macpherson seemed to be bringing attention to a previously

unknown literary culture. He seemed to have discovered the Scottish Gaelic version of Homer, putting Scottish Gaelic literature on the same level as the ancient Greeks.

Like many of his day, I found the poems beautiful and compelling, telling stories of ancient Scottish heroes and wild Highland landscapes filled with danger and adventure. I was swept away by the imagery and the fairytale aspects of the stories. I saw no reason not to believe Macpherson's claims about where the poems came from or his part in their collection and translation.

In class, Dr. Baker revealed to us that the Ossian poems were a forgery. Macpherson had written the poems himself, making up the story about finding an ancient Scottish Gaelic manuscript to give credibility to the writing and to himself. Why he did it—whether to become rich and famous, or to give credence to the literary and intellectual culture of the Scottish Highlands—is still argued about by scholars today, nearly three centuries after he published the work. Some scholars claim that he based the Ossian cycle on real poems he heard recited in the Highlands during his childhood, and just took great liberties in the editing process. Others claim he made up the poems and the ruse to make a name for himself.

To me, the controversy was as captivating as the poems themselves. I did a research paper on the Ossian controversy for that class, trying to puzzle out Macpherson's motives. The more I learned about the controversy, the more questions I had about the Scottish Highlands, the mysterious landscape that birthed the poems in one way or another. In the course of researching that paper, I discovered that Scottish Gaelic was a dying language, a fact that fascinated me. It made me wonder at the process of language death, and what social processes bring it about. I was also intrigued about the entirety of Scottish culture, especially in regards to the Highlands. Macpherson himself was a Highlander, and his Ossian poems created a romanticized view of the

Scottish landscape and Scottish myths. I wondered how much of his writings were based on the reality of the Highlands, and which originated in his imagination. No matter his motives for the ruse, I couldn't help but wonder why Macpherson would risk his literary career on it. The Scottish Gaels were scorned by the English and the Lowland Scots and ignored by everyone else. Promoting them seemed to be a risky move. Even if he was able to convince everyone that his poems were genuine, there was no guarantee that anyone would want to read them. If his goal was to become rich and famous, why would he choose to write about the Scottish Highlands? What did he see in his home country that everyone else seemed to miss?

It was not that I wanted to understand Macpherson or his motives. I had done enough research to realize that we will never know his reasons for fabricating the Ossian poems. But I did want to understand more about the Scottish Highlands, and about Scotland as a whole. I wanted to know how accurate his portrayal of the Scottish Highlands was. I wanted to know more about real Scottish Gaelic poetry, about the history of the Highlands, and about the status of Scottish Gaelic today.

The poems opened the door on a culture I knew little about. I had traveled to Scotland before, but had known little about it beyond the stereotypical kilts, Scotch whisky, and bagpipes. I wanted to go back, carrying a better understanding of the country and questions about how its history shaped its culture today. Studying abroad there seemed like the perfect way to experience the culture in my daily life, while also getting to take a more scholarly look at Scotland's past in my classes.

Although I talk about the Ossian poems in the first section of my thesis, they are not the main focus of this thesis. They were the instigator of my quest to understand Scotland better.

My short time in Scotland didn't answer all the questions I had about the nation. I did come back with a greater understanding of the Scots' love for their country and its history, the decline of Scottish Gaelic, and Scotland's place in the UK and the world. I understand how Scots like Macpherson viewed the Highlands and Scotland, and much of the historical turmoil Scotland as a whole as endured. But again, the more I learn, the more questions I have. The farther I delve into Scottish history and culture, the more paths I see trailing off into the darkness, waiting to be explored.

A Note on Genre

In the beginning, I considered doing a traditional research thesis on the Ossian controversy, expanding on the paper I wrote my first semester at UT. After going to Scotland, however, I realized I had much more material than that. I had a goldmine of experiences—from conversations I had had with Scots, to places I had visited around the country, to books I had read. There were many ideas that I wanted to explore after my return from Scotland, and a traditional research thesis wouldn't allow me to do that in a way that satisfied me. Writing this thesis as a travel memoir rather than a research thesis allowed me to puzzle out my experiences in Scotland while still doing research on the topics that intrigued me. Additionally, it allowed me to engage in my passion for creative writing.

Most Plan II students are “Plan II and...” Professors will ask you what your second major is, because the vast majority of students have at least one more. I am the only student that I know that is purely Plan II. The reason for that is largely that I did not want to confine myself to any one discipline. Not choosing another major allowed me to take many more electives in whatever

field I chose. I took a linguistics class, English classes, sociology classes, philosophy classes, and even an architecture class. I loved them all. I enjoyed being able to learn a little bit about everything, and was intrigued by all the concepts I encountered. To me, everything I learned was connected. I couldn't help but think about one discipline while I was learning about another. I felt like I was getting a much more complete and nuanced view of the world this way than I would if I committed to one discipline.

This thesis allows me the same kind of freedom. Choosing not to focus on just Ossian or any other aspect of my time in Scotland allowed me to explore the experience as a whole in greater depth. Like all of my classes, all the topics I explore in this thesis are related, linked together in the spiderweb of knowledge. Each one gives greater nuance to all the others. Each section could be read as a standalone essay, but they work much better when read together.

Nearly all of the classes I have taken throughout college influenced the way I approached this thesis, shaping the way I think about the concepts I explore here. I explore many different topics from different directions, trying to figure out the meaning of each individual experience in the context of the greater world.

In the course of writing this memoir, I have learned three important things about the genre. The first is that a memoir is not about recording your thoughts. Instead, you have to think about yourself as a character, and have to introduce yourself as such to your readers. You have to assume that they know nothing about you, so you must build yourself up as you would a character in fiction and create a character arc that may or may not have existed in real life. You have to think more critically about how you changed and grew as a result of an experience than you would normally. Although this may involve some exaggeration in some cases, in this one I didn't have to play up how my experiences changed me.

The second thing I learned is that a memoir is about telling a story about your past from your current point in life. The “me” character that you are writing about is not the same “me” as the one doing the writing. You aren’t looking at the events with the same point of view that you had when you were living them. You are telling them from a point of view of someone who is older and wiser, someone who knows how the story is going to end. I am looking back on the events in Scotland knowing that I was going to leave halfway through the semester. While I was there, I thought I had so much more time to do everything that I wanted to do. Now, I look back knowing that the pandemic was coming. In the weeks and months after I returned, so many things happened that shaped the way I viewed my time in Scotland, such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the storming of the US capitol. Although these events don’t come into the story, they did shape the mindset I was in while writing many of these sections, influencing the way that I thought about the topics I was discussing. They changed the way I think about justice, discrimination, and political power, which I touch on in this thesis. It would be a stretch to say I was glad I lived through these things, but I wouldn’t have written this memoir if they hadn’t happened. I have been changed by the events that happened between when I was in Scotland and now. This thesis is nothing like the journal I kept while in Scotland, and it will be different from any pieces I write about Scotland later in my life. Time changes things, and writing this memoir was a lesson in how your perspective can shift in just a short time.

The third is that writing a memoir is a different experience from writing a piece of fiction. Stephen King once described the act of writing fiction like archeology. “Stories are found things, like fossils in the ground,” King said, “... [they are] part of an undiscovered, pre-existing world” (King 163). As you write, you are unearthing more and more of the story. It is like you are discovering, rather than creating. I agreed with his description. Often when I’m writing, and

it's going well, I don't feel like I am coming up with the story or the words. They are just flowing through me. I am not in control of where the story goes; I am just the conduit through which the story gets from the imagined world out into the real one. I never know what the finished story is going to be, or where I'm going to end up.

Writing a memoir is different. I knew the material I had, I knew where the story started and how it ended. The hard part was writing all of it down and making it make sense. Creating a story out of my experiences and ideas felt more like I was sculpting it out of clay, rather than discovering it. I knew from the beginning what material I had, and how much I had, but it was malleable. There some limits to the shapes I could make out of the material, but overall, I was surprised at how flexible it all was. But that didn't mean the shaping was easy. In some ways, writing this memoir felt like more work than any piece of fiction I had written, not only because it was so much longer, but because I felt like I was a much more active participant in its creation.

Writing this memoir involved many changes throughout the process. The structure I started out with was almost nothing like the later drafts. I had to rework the order of it, changing how I used my material. Parts that I initially placed in one section ended up working better in another. It was all about shaping my ideas so that they fit the structure I was creating, taking material away in some sections and adding more to others as I went along. Writing, I learned, is a fluid process, one that never seems to be complete. No matter what changes you make, there are always more that could be made, or things you could have done differently, to produce different results.

Influences

My greatest inspiration for this work is my own experience. Often, I would hear or read some simple fact about Scotland and would want to find the deeper truth behind it. Other times, I would experience something in Scotland, such as going to a museum or to a cultural event, and would learn something that I wanted to explore more. I wanted to understand how these little bits of knowledge fit into the greater whole.

That said, there were several authors who shaped the way that I approached this subject matter. One was Madeleine Bunting, whose travel memoir *Love of Country* recounts her travels through the Islands of Scotland. She hops from island to island, exploring the historical and cultural importance of each place she visits, and explaining how each one plays into Scotland's history and culture as a whole. I was inspired by how she used these places in order to explore specific aspects of Scotland. Her memoir was less about her journey through the islands and more about Scotland, giving a view of the country that was less romantic and more factual than many accounts. Her memoir was more impersonal than mine, but it did give a lot of insight into Scotland today.

Another was Rebecca Solnit, who had written several memoirs—some about travel, others not. Specifically, I was inspired by her works *The Faraway Nearby*, which is about how she grappled with difficult family relationships, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, about travel and exploration, and *A Book of Migrations*, which talks about her journey through Ireland. All of them concern themselves with the ideas of place and identity, two topics that I explore in depth in my own work. She also talks about the value of travel, in getting to know a place through experience. She connects her personal experiences to history and literature in sometimes bizarre ways, stretching the limits of what is possible in a memoir. *A Book of Migrations* in particular

influenced my own work greatly. In her memoir, she describes her walking journey across Ireland, which is culturally and historically similar to Scotland in many ways. She talks about ancestry and travel, as well as how our interactions with the land now are much different than the ways people used to interact with the land before there were cars or other rapid methods of transportation. These ideas come up in several sections of my thesis as well. Her works raised many questions that I wanted to explore more in my thesis, using my own experience as a lens. My work is stylistically different from hers, but we cover many of the same ideas.

One thing I have always tried to do as a writer is to maintain my own voice. I try not to mimic another author's work, and instead stay true to my own style and ideas. At the same time, I have no doubt that the authors I have read have influenced my voice more than I realize. Although Bunting and Solnit are the ones that I think of most as influences on this work, they are far from the only authors who have inspired me. I have tried not to mimic any one author's style, but I am sure that elements of many writers come through in this thesis.

Overview of Sections

In this thesis, I cover a wide range of topics. At first glance, they may seem unrelated, but in my mind, they are all connected. They complement each other, adding depth and nuance to each other as they go along.

The first section is about the ways we assign stories to place, not only on a personal level but also on a cultural level. In Scotland, I realized how integral stories are, not only to our own lives, but also to the places we inhabit. These stories shape the way we view our hometowns and foreign places alike. They define how we view specific places and why we consider those places

important. In this section, I explore the ways that my experiences growing up in Austin have shaped my perception of the city, and the ways that the stories and legends that are told about Scotland shape how it is perceived. Here, I talk about how the Ossian poems drove me to Scotland. I also talk about other Scottish authors like Sir Walter Scott who created a romanticized view of Scotland, one that is all too easy to buy into. I also talk about a few contested stories from the history of Edinburgh, and how each one changes the nature of the place depending on which you choose to believe. I consider how all of these stories influence how Scotland is thought of, both by Scots and by foreigners.

The second section is about independence, both mine and Scotland's. My two and a half months in Scotland was the first time I had ever lived on my own, and the first time I had ever been more than a thirty-minute drive away from my family for more than a few days. I had to navigate social anxiety and homesickness as I figured out how to live in a new country by myself. Going to Scotland meant stepping out of my comfort zone, often in potentially anxiety-inducing ways, but it also meant becoming more confident of my ability to stand alone in the world. This is paralleled by Scotland's independence movement, one that has existed for centuries and had only intensified with the 2014 independence referendum and, later, with Brexit. I explore some of that history in this section, as well as the situation today. Politics has never been an interest of mine, so I do not spend much time on the political aspects of this independence struggle. Instead, I focus more on how the independence movement affects individual identity. I was intrigued by the ways that the Scots navigated their identities as both Brits and as Scots, and how they sought balance between the two. I look at how these conflicting identities shape their attitudes towards Scottish independence and the way they navigate the world.

The third section is about Scottish Gaelic and my experience trying to learn it and seek it out while I was in Scotland. Before arriving in Scotland, I had read about the plight of Scottish Gaelic, specifically about Scots' ambivalence to keeping the language alive. Still, I was shocked at how unconcerned most Scots were about the impending death of the language. Some Scots I encountered were simply confused as to why I was interested in the language, and treated me as an oddity. Others were hostile to the language and couldn't seem to understand why I'd bother learning it. Although there were students who were passionate about learning the language, and people who have lobbied for increased use of the language and who make it a part of their everyday lives, they were in the minority. Watching this debate play out in everyday life, as well as learning about it in the classroom, was a thrilling experience for me. In this section, I talk about these experiences and the status of Scottish Gaelic today. I look at the problems the language has faced and the reasons for its decline, as well as the continued hostility towards the language in Scotland today. Altogether, these experiences do not give cause to be optimistic about the future of Scottish Gaelic.

The fourth section is about how the places we come from shape who we are. The Scottish Highlanders have a deep connection to the land they live on, a connection that most Americans lack. The Highlanders' personal and ancestral history in a place, as well as the ways they interact with the land, give them an intimate relationship with the land they live on. Most Americans do not have that sort of connection. This made me consider my own relationship to Austin, and the ways that our modern world uproots people, destroying their connections to the land. I also look at the concepts of ancestry and heritage, and how the places our families come from influence who we are. I also explore how attitudes in Scotland about land ownership and use differ from those in the US, and the consequences of those different views.

The fifth is about Christianity in Scotland. Before arriving, I had read that like Scottish Gaelic, Christianity in Scotland was dying. Unlike with Gaelic, I went in with low expectations. I had read many articles about the decline in Christianity in Scotland, especially amongst disenchanting young adults. I was worried that I would not make any friends that believed the same things I did. I also worried because young adults are the ones who call for change when it is needed most, and the Christian church as an organization is often in desperate need of reform. I was concerned that all the harmful aspects of the church would die unchallenged, because there were no young people to call for change. That was not what I found when I went to Scotland. Instead, I was surrounded by young adults who were invested in changing the world and the organizations they were a part of, and with being good role models for younger generations. In this section, I share these experiences and how they surprised me. I talk about my experience in Young Life, a Christian organization that I have been a part in throughout college in Austin, and one I unexpectedly became involved in in Scotland. This organization is led by and targeted towards the young people, the ones who have the power and energy to change the world, and the ones that are often seen as the most disenchanting with religion. I met many Christian college students who were involved in many Christian organizations and were actively trying to change problems they saw in the church and in the world. While I found no cause for optimism in regards to Scottish Gaelic, I did find reason for it in regards to Christianity in Scotland. In fact, I felt that there was much I could learn from the Christians I met in Scotland.

The final section is about the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to my abrupt return to the US, exactly halfway through the semester. In this section, I explore how unrecognizable the world I returned to was. In the weeks and months after my return, I was bitter about the opportunities that had been taken from me and disenchanting with the broken world I returned to.

I yearned for a return to Scotland, where everything seemed possible and all things seemed magical and beautiful. But in this time, I also reflected on all that I learned from my time in Scotland, as well as from having to come back so much sooner than I had anticipated. In this section, I circle back on many topics I have explored throughout the thesis, and what they taught me about the value of travel and about the world I returned to.

In my mind, these varied topics together form a defense of travel. One of the biggest things the pandemic has stripped from all of us is the freedom of movement. I worry that travel will never be the same in the world post-coronavirus. I doubt that it will disappear completely, but it will not be unchanged. I explore this idea in the final section as well.

A Note on the Title

I call this memoir *Terra Incognita*, which is Latin for “unknown land.” Cartographers used to write the phrase on maps to designate the places that had yet to be explored. It is an idea that Rebecca Solnit explores in her memoir *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* as well. She writes, “the terra incognita spaces on maps say that knowledge also is an island surrounded by oceans of the unknown. They signify that the cartographers knew they did not know, and awareness of ignorance is not just ignorance; its awareness of knowledge’s limits” (*A Field Guide* 163). Cartographers and explorers knew how much they knew, and also that there was much more that they didn’t yet know about.

My journey to Scotland was a trip into the Terra Incognita; it was a trip into an unfamiliar land and unfamiliar circumstances, where I was challenged in unforeseen ways. Although I had read about Scotland before I arrived, I went knowing that there was much I did not know. The

longer I was there, the less foreign and unknown the country felt. Yet even now, I know there is much about Scotland that I do not know, and more that I would like to learn about. In many ways, it still feels like a Terra Incognita.

This pandemic is also a Terra Incognita. By now, the word “unprecedented” is triggering to many of us; we are so tired of this unknown and all the uncertainty it brings. We don’t know what the future will look like. None of us know when this will end, nor what the world will look like afterwards. Many things—including travel, and with it, travel memoirs—will likely never be the same again. This point in history feels like a turning point, although we don’t know things will change on the other side, in the Terra Incognita.

I have thought about this memoir as the last of the pre-coronavirus travel memoirs, or the first of the post-corona memoirs. It straddles the boundary between what was and what will be. It is looking back at one Terra Incognita which has become familiar to me, and looking forwards at one which is still unknown.

Unknown places can be a cause for fear. So much is uncertain, you never know what challenges you will face. But the farther you travel into it, the more you learn. The unknown gradually becomes familiar, and perhaps even comfortable. Scotland taught me that this can happen even in the most unexpected ways. I had been so worried about living abroad by myself because of my social anxiety, but in the end, I felt more comfortable in Scotland than I have anywhere else in the world. It gives me hope for the future. Perhaps nothing will ever be the same, but perhaps there will be some good in that. One day, all these changes will feel normal, and we may even learn to love life on the other side, even if it never goes back to the way it used to be.

Call for further scholarship

Although this is not a research thesis, I did a significant amount of research to support my writing throughout. I was often frustrated by how little scholarship there was out there about these topics that I wanted to explore. Many aspects of Scottish culture, especially when it comes to Scottish Gaelic and Gaelic poetry, have not been given much attention by scholars worldwide. It made writing this memoir frustrating at times. There were many facts that I learned about in class in Scotland, through lectures or readings, or through museums in Scotland, that I wanted to include in this memoir. I had to leave many out as I couldn't find any sources that I could cite to back up these facts.

Any one of these sections I write about could be turned into a paper in and of itself. Each one points at opportunities for further study. I am not a sociologist, a human geographer, a historian, or a political scientist. I do not have the expertise to be able to explore each of these topics with the academic rigor they deserve. I know enough about these disciplines to explore these topics on a surface level and to see the gaps in scholarship, but not enough to fill these gaps.

That said, I am a writer. I love experiencing the world and exploring the ideas I encounter in more depth, fitting them into the greater whole of what I know about the world. My goal here is not to present rigorous academic arguments, but to share my experiences and the ideas they churned up in me. I want to share how my time in Scotland shaped me and shifted the way I view the world. My hope is that others are challenged and inspired by what I write. I hope that they would reexamine their view of the world, and be willing to dive into deeper academic study of some of the things I write about here. I would hope that Scotland would get much more academic attention as a result. There is so much to be explored there, so much more we can still

learn, and I hope that someday someone would try to answer the questions I raise, more than I ever could.

A Return to Scotland?

Any writing that talks about a journey seems to raise the question about whether the author will ever return to the place they visit in the work. Since my return to the US, countless people have asked me whether I want to go back to Scotland someday. The answer to that is unequivocally yes. There are so many places that I didn't get to visit while I was in Scotland that I want to go back to see. There are also so many people in Edinburgh that I did not get to say goodbye to, ones that I would love to see again if given the chance. And, as I have said before, there is still so much more that I want to learn about Scotland. Research seems to raise as many questions as it does answers, and there are so many new things that I want to learn more about. And I would love to write about it all. I foresee many writing projects involving Scotland in my future. Some I might start as soon as I finish this thesis. Others may have to wait until I can go back to Scotland.

While I was in Scotland, moving there felt like a real possibility. As I walked through Edinburgh, I imagined myself living in a flat with a blue door looking out at a little neighborhood park where a bunch of kids were practicing rugby. After my abrupt return to the US and the pandemic, however, that dream seemed less attainable. I became aware of all the practicalities of having to uproot my life in Austin and move completely to Scotland. The idea felt far-fetched. The pandemic certainly cowed that part of me that lets my imagination run away. But I don't think that part of me is gone completely. There are still parts of me that dream

of walking through the Meadows in springtime under the cherry buds, making my way up to Edinburgh Castle, and spending my evenings in a pub with a notebook or a novel. Whether that dream will ever come true is anybody's guess.

If I do not move to Scotland, I will at least travel there again sometime in the future, likely as soon as this pandemic is behind us. I do not think I will be getting over my obsession with Scotland anytime soon.

I think of myself as a traveler and a writer. I hope that this thesis will be the first of many travel pieces I write in my lifetime. I hope to make a career out of those two passions, traveling and writing. Right now, I am not sure what my future holds, but I hope that it will include those two things, and I hope Scotland gets to play a part in it all.

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Section I: A Question of Place

Chapter 1- Stories, Place, and the Burdens of History

Joan Didion once wrote, “we tell ourselves stories in order to live” (Didion). I used to think she was referring to writers and their insatiable need to create stories. Bees have to make honey, beavers have to build dams, and writers have to tell stories. Our existence is tied up in our sense of purpose; if we couldn’t do the thing that we felt we were designed to do, we might fade away.

When I was in elementary school, whenever people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I said I wanted to be an author. I wanted to tell stories for a living. I don’t know how this decision came about; I don’t remember the first time I wrote a story. But I vividly remember challenging my grandmother to writing competitions when I was young. I remember filling journal after journal on long summer days with stories I created out of thin air. I feel as though I am hardwired for writing, for stringing words together and weaving them into themes and plots and characters. When I am not writing, I am often daydreaming, creating stories in my head that I will never exist anywhere except in my own imagination. I can’t help it. To me, living is storytelling. Without it, I would seek to exist.

But Didion wasn’t talking about the composition of fictions that I thought of when I thought of storytelling. She was talking about the sense-making process we go through in order to give life meaning. Human beings like things to make sense. We like patterns and structures that they can file details into. Little details don’t matter unless they are linked together into a greater whole. Storytelling is an easy way to do that. Storytelling is what makes cause-and-effect reasoning possible—it is how we link events together into a chain that brings about a predictable conclusion. We tell ourselves stories about who we are, and that affects how we present ourselves to others. We also tell ourselves stories about why places matter.

Stories are so deeply ingrained in our view of the world that we forget that they are something we impose upon the world. This is especially true with place. The stories we associate with a place define its character or importance. Why is a haunted house considered haunted? Why is a battlefield a historic site? Why is your favorite place your favorite place? All of these have to do with the memories, the stories, we attach to a place. We forget that those stories are not innate to the place; they are imposed. If we disappeared, and if our memories of those places died with us, those places would lose their meaning, because the stories would disappear.

A Native American tribe called the Western Apache has a special mode of conversation called “speaking with names” (Basso 106). When they speak with names, they mention a placename in order to invoke a particular folktale that has a moral that relates to the subject at hand. Mentioning the setting of the particular story is like saying the title of the story. It would be akin saying “the West Egg” instead of *The Great Gatsby*. The folktales were so familiar to everyone in the community that the speaker didn’t need to tell the story to get their point across; they only needed to mention the placename in order to invoke the memory of the story in the listener’s mind.

In that culture, the stories were so inextricably linked to their settings that the setting itself could stand in for the story. The place was defined by that story, a story that often seemed to be linked arbitrarily to the place. This seems odd, until we think about haunted houses and battlefields and about the stories and memories that those places evoke. The truth is, we invest place with story too, although perhaps not in the same way.

Until I studied abroad in Scotland during my junior year of college, I never thought about how important stories are to places. As a writer, I knew that setting was a crucial component of stories, and that a plot that might occur in one place would be implausible somewhere else. But I

never thought about how stories could shape the real world, or at least the way that we perceive it. I never thought about how my memories shaped my perception of particular places in my hometown until I lived somewhere else and saw how stories shaped the culture and landscape of Scotland.



There is a song that we sometimes sing in church called “Come Thou Fount.” It’s an old hymn, one whose language sounds archaic to modern ears. Yet we sing it all the same. There is a line in it that says “here I raise mine Ebenezer” (Robinson). For many years, the line confused me because I had no idea what an Ebenezer was. The word brought to mind Ebenezer Scrooge and the ghosts of Christmas in Charles Dickens’s classic novel (a story I have find too creepy and depressing for Christmas, even with its happy ending). Eventually, someone told me that an Ebenezer was an altar that the Jews used to build on the site where miracles had occurred. They were like those historical plaques along the highway that tell you about an interesting event that happened in a place barely seems noteworthy today. They were reminders that God had done something important there, something worth worshipping Him for.

Modern Christians don’t talk about holy ground that way. But the concept reminded me of the way we attach memories to places in a secular sense. All of us have places that are special to us for various reasons. Not holy, exactly, but significant nonetheless. Some of them are almost sacred to us. The house you grew up in, the place you first met your significant other, the spot where you got married. Your grandfather’s house, the street where you learned to ride a bike, the coffeeshop where you always meet your friend. The places change with time, but they still hold memories for you. You construct imaginary Ebenezers in places that will always be special to you, no matter what.

At the same time, there are places that seem to be forever tainted, places ruined by bad memories. It seems unfair to let a few bad memories ruin a place that mostly likely was not at fault for what happened, but we do it nonetheless. There are places we avoid, places we hope never to set foot in again. They are sort of anti-Ebenezers, marking cursed ground instead of holy.

Every landscape is speckled with invisible Ebenezers and anti-Ebenezers, places that were significant to specific individuals over the centuries. Most of these places are unmarked, so that no one else will ever know that this place was special, or haunted, to anyone else. To them, the place will probably be forgettable, because they don't know the history. The land is littered with memories that most of us will never see.



In North Austin where I grew up, there is a shopping center called the Arboretum. There is an Amy's Ice Cream there, with a park behind it that contains a grove of limestone cow sculptures. When I was little, my dad used to take me there on Friday afternoons to get ice cream at Amy's and sit on the cows. There is also a duck pond down the hill from the cows, where, apparently, my dad and I once got attacked by an evil swan. I have no recollection of the incident, as I was a toddler at the time, but I am still terrified of swans.

It's probably been fifteen or sixteen years since those Friday afternoon outings, but I still go to the Arboretum from time to time. I've hung out with many of my friends at that park over the years, and I've had ice cream there more times than I can count. I still sometimes visit that duck pond, giving the swans plenty of space. That place has been the backdrop for many of my

best memories. And yet, even though the memories have dulled with time, I still associate that place with those Friday afternoon outings with my dad.

Sometimes, when college gets to be too much for me, I drive to the Arboretum. Some days, I don't even get out of my car. It's a comforting spot to me, somewhere where I feel safe. A place that holds memories that bring me joy. An Ebenezer.

Spending your entire life in the same city, the landscape of your life is covered with memories, layered one on top of the other like coats of paint. Austin is like that for me. Nearly everywhere has some sort of memory attached to it. Sometimes they're good memories, like those at the Arboretum. Some of them, however, are not.



My freshman year of college, a boy I went to elementary school with was arrested for hiring a hit man to kill his parents. His mother had managed to survive the attack. His father was not so lucky. Although it had been nearly a decade since I had seen him, I had talked to him a few times over the years. I hadn't seen his father since I was in sixth grade, but he still sat up on a pedestal in my memory. He and my mother used to talk in the parking lot every morning when they dropped us off at school. At my friend's birthday party in second grade at laser tag, his father had stuck with me the entire game, making sure I wasn't frightened by the darkness and all the kids running around with laser guns. There were few adults I trusted and respected as wholly as I respected him. I couldn't imagine that anyone would ever want him dead. Especially not his own son, a boy who had once been one of my closest friends.

His parents owned a jewelry store on 35th Street. It's been nearly three years since his father died, and yet sometimes I still drive around the block so I don't have to pass it and see the

vacant store with the For Sale sign plastered to the darkened windows. I don't know if the case ever went to trial, or how it turned out. I don't want to know.

Until then, I didn't mind going to college in the same city I grew up in. I did have a latent fear that if I went to college in Austin, I would be stuck here for the rest of my life, but I attributed that to wanderlust. There were certainly places in Austin I didn't like, places that I wouldn't return to unless I had to, but none of them felt haunted. Not like that spot on 35th Street.



The good thing about growing up in one city is that you constantly have chances to redeem those places that carry bad memories. I played laser tag a few years back at that same place where I played with my friend's late father in second grade. I laughed harder that night than I had in weeks. I recently went back to my high school, a place with its own foul memories, to take pictures on its beautiful campus with one of my friends, one I had met there years before. The intersection downtown where I once got so lost that I gave up on meeting my friends and drove home in tears is now a spot I drive past frequently to meet a friend. The history piles up, the memories layer on one after another, wiping away what once was and replacing it with something better. Now, Austin is filled with more Ebenezers than haunted places for me.

But that still doesn't mean that I want to stay here forever. Sometimes, leaving is not a question of escaping or starting over. Sometimes, it is for the sake of adventure.

Chapter 2- Travel

Before the invention of the car, many Irish people never traveled more than ten miles from the place they were born (*A Book of Migrations* 113). They spent every day of their life, from first until the last, within a ten-mile circle, because that was as far as they could travel on foot in order to be back home by the end of the day. Ten miles out, ten miles back.

Until I studied abroad in Scotland in the spring of my junior year of college, I had lived my entire life within a ten-mile radius in the city of Austin. At UT, being a native Austinite makes me a rarity. The majority of students at UT have come from other cities around Texas. One of my professors called me a unicorn when I told him I was from Austin.

My father was born in Austin too, and has lived his entire life within the same ten-mile circle as I had. That makes him even more a rarity than I am. We were born in the same hospital and, much later, we went to the same university. Things had changed in the thirty or so years between when he lived out that part of his life and when I lived out that part of mine, but at the same time, there were many things that did not change.

Growing up, when I would ride shotgun in his big black pickup truck, he would point out the places where he grew up. *There's my old elementary school*, he'd say. *That's where my college apartment was. That's the road I designed for my first job at an engineering firm.*

Recently, I was driving through Austin with a friend, and we passed by several places that I hadn't visited in years. *There's my high school*, I said. *There's the house my grandma used to live in. There's the intersection where my first car stalled.* My friend probably didn't care about the stories I was telling her about the places we passed, but they were important to me. I

could see how my life was an overlay on the landscape in which my father had lived his entire life.

I often wondered if my dad wished he hadn't stayed in Austin. I wondered if he ever felt tired of the same old scenery with the same old memories attached to it. I wondered if he ever longed for a clean slate, one untarnished by the ruins of what used to be. Because I certainly did.

My dad and I are similar in many ways, but I cannot imagine living in one place as long as he has. I cannot imagine spending the rest of my life within a ten-mile radius. It is not as though I want to be rootless, constantly moving from place to place, but I do want to live somewhere other than Austin. I want to see more of the world, and live in an area that is more than a day's walk from the place I was born.

I strongly suspect that I got that from my mother.



Whereas my father is an Austinite, born and bred, my mother is harder to place. Her dad was in the military, so she grew up an army brat, moving from city to city every few years. She and her brothers like to tell stories from their childhoods, stories that take place in Louisiana or Colorado or Maryland, places that I can only imagine. My favorite of their stories take place in Germany, where they lived for a total of six years. As a child, the idea of living in a different country fascinated me.

Her family lived on an army base at the bottom of Sheep Shit Hill. Whether that was the translation of the German name for the hill or the name the American kids gave it, I don't know. I do know that it was where a shepherd would graze his flocks. My mother and her brothers had to hike over the hill to school every day. In the wintertime, they had to make the trek through the

snow. My mother said that on cold days, she had to be careful not to go outside with wet hair or else it would freeze solid and could break off. I imagined her climbing up a snow-covered, treeless hill, swaddled in a giant coat and shiny black boots and a little knitted beanie, lugging her backpack up the hill and down the other side to school in the mornings, then going back the other way in the evenings. She said she and her brothers used to sled down the hill sometimes, a feat that was unimaginable to me in flat and snowless central Texas.

She talked about their car in Germany, one that had been passed from one military family to another as one was stationed there and another moved out, like a worn-out hand-me-down from countless older siblings. Her father, my grandfather, used to sit in the car on Saturday nights in the fall to listen to the LSU football games on the radio. The car radio, my mom explained, had better reception than the one they had in the house. It was chilly out, especially in the middle of the night late in the season, but he never missed it when his alma mater played. I could imagine him sitting alone in the tattered front seat, an LSU t-shirt on under his coat, listening to the grainy static of the radio. I could hear his trademark touchdown laugh when the team scored, a plume of steam rising from his lips in the crisp air. It was a scene from another world.

I wondered what it was like to grow up in a world that spoke a different language, knowing that you wouldn't be there forever. I wondered what everyday life was like there—going to the grocery store and hearing all the German voices, or going to a restaurant and not understanding a thing on the menu.

I have often dreamed about traveling to Germany with her someday and trying to retrace her childhood, the way my father sometimes does in Austin. I want to see the places where she

spent her childhood, and hear what stories those places might stir up in her memory. I wonder what sorts of Ebenezers she has constructed in that country across the Atlantic.

I decided at a young age that I was going to live in another country someday, as she had. I wasn't sure where, but knew I wanted to. I wanted to be able to tell stories about all the places I had visited and the people I had met while living in a faraway land.



My family has always loved to travel. When I was young, I took the adventures at face value, as a chance for a change of scenery. I didn't understand the lessons my parents were implicitly teaching my sister and me back then by taking us on vacations. We went to beaches and museums, to sea turtle hatcheries and navy battleships. We ate exotic foods in restaurants and people-watched on the streets. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was learning to explore a new culture, and to love doing so. My parents turned me into a traveler long before I realized what they were up to, getting me hooked on traveling long before I could articulate its benefits. From San Francisco to Washington, D.C, from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean, they introduced me to culture after culture, and taught me how to experience life in a new place.

I didn't understand back then how travel teaches you to be more appreciative of other cultures and ways of life that are different from your own. Travel forces you to step out of your comfort zone and view another way of life as an outsider, helping you to see the value in doing things differently. Seeing how others view the world can trigger new ideas of how you can view your own world back home, helping you solve problems that you couldn't work out before. It also leads you to be more tolerant and appreciative of people who are different from you, who

have different beliefs or values or habits. It helps you let go of the idea that your way is the only right way to live.

Back then, I didn't understand all of this. I was aware that we sometimes visited places that I had read about in books or talked in history classes. I was aware that experiencing these places for myself, rather than just reading or hearing about them, helped me put them into perspective. I was aware that I was learning, but I didn't realize how much I was learning.



The summer after my sophomore year of high school, my family took a vacation to England for two weeks. It was the first time we had ever traveled anywhere outside of North America. We mostly stayed in London during that time, except for when we traveled to Edinburgh for a weekend.

On the train ride up to Scotland, we sat at a table across from a quartet of jolly Englishmen who were drinking beer and chatting the entire way. At some point in our journey, one of them leaned over to us and apologized if they were being too raucous. He explained that they were on holiday to Scotland, where they were going to take a friend's boat and sail to as many whisky distilleries on the Scottish isles as they could. This pulled us into conversation with them. They asked where we were from, and how long we would be in the country. When we told them we were from Austin, one of the men reached into his luggage and pulled out an atlas. He flipped through and found a map of Texas.

"It's right there in the middle, innit?" he said, pointing out the dot on the page to his buddy beside him.

As surprised as I was that the man had brought an atlas with him on their booze cruise, I was even more surprised that he didn't know where Austin was without it. Austin claimed to be the Live Music Capital of the World; I thought for sure they would have informed the rest of the world about it. To these Englishmen, the center of my universe was just a dot on a map. I had always known the world was vast, but it had never occurred to me how small that made my hometown, and by extension, me, until that moment. It was the first time I realized how much travel could change your perspective of the world.

Chapter 3- Monsters in My Head

As much as I loved traveling with my family, you would think the decision to study abroad would be an easy one. But traveling to a foreign country with your parents for two weeks is very different from living there alone for five months. While I grew up dreaming of living abroad by myself, there was a time when I thought such a thing would not be possible.

If you asked any two people who knew me as a child to describe me, there are two words they would likely choose. The first would be smart. The second would be shy. The childhood lesson “don’t talk to strangers” was my motto for life. And it wasn’t just strangers. I avoided talking to anyone that wasn’t my family or my friends whenever possible, even if I knew the people too well to consider them strangers. Every year in parent-teacher conferences, my teacher would say that I was a bright, responsible, sweet kid, but that I really should speak up more. These promptings never led me to talk any more than I had to. I hated speaking up in class. I was terrified of being wrong, and terrified of having the other kids make fun of me for saying something stupid.

In kindergarten, I hated calling other kids by their names because I was terrified of getting it wrong. When my parents and I went to tour a new school after sixth grade, I would involuntarily step back behind my dad whenever the vice principal would talk to me. Sophomore year of high school, I got lightheaded and was on the verge of passing out every time I had to give a speech in class.

After I got my driver’s license, my mom sent me to the grocery store to practice driving for the first time on my own. What scared me most was not the driving part, but going into the

grocery store by myself. I avoided doing that again until I went to college and had no choice in the matter.

When I was named valedictorian in high school, I plotted ways to get out of giving a speech. In the end, I gave it, although I was so stressed that I don't remember most of graduation.

It occurred to me that there might be something wrong with me, but I told myself I was just shy. Public speaking was a common fear, and plenty of middle schoolers and high schoolers were insecure. I told myself I was fine.

When it was time to go off to college, I had a lot of reasons for staying in Austin and going to UT rather than picking another college elsewhere. The first was that I had grown up dreaming of being a Longhorn just like my parents. A close second was the fact that, on some level, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to handle moving to a new city on my own. Judging by the way I handled that first year of college, deciding to stay in Austin was a wise choice.

My freshman year of college, I began to realize that the level of fear I carried about everyday actions was not normal. I still hated going to the grocery store. I was extremely picky about where I studied because having too many people sitting in an enclosed space stressed me out. I still hated speaking up in class, although I usually had a good answer to the professors' questions if they called on me.

That year, the dining hall was the bane of my existence. I hated going at peak hours, when it was filled with people and there were no empty tables. When I went, I tried to go at times when it wasn't so busy, and I only took food from self-serve lines so that I didn't have to talk to the staff. I would sit alone as I ate and pretend that I was invisible. On days where I was especially stressed about school, I would tell myself I wasn't that hungry and would eat peanut

butter and jelly sandwiches in my dorm room, or skip meals altogether. It occurred to me that this wasn't a healthy existence, but I didn't know what to do about it other than white-knuckle my way through it.

That year, I felt out of place and tense all the time. I was a coil of stress that would wind tighter and tighter every day, always at risk of exploding. Since I was not good at talking to strangers, I was not good at making friends. Most aspects of college involve a social element, whether it is class or clubs or just hanging out in the common room of the dorms, and every bit of it stressed me out. Looking around at my friends and classmates, I realized that no one around me seemed to be struggling the way that I was. It was like we were playing a game where everyone else already knew the rules and I did not. Everyone around me seemed to thrive, while I was struggling to keep my head above water. I got emails and saw signs around campus about the mental health center, but I knew that going would involve talking to a stranger, and besides, I didn't know how to articulate what was going on even if I went. I figured I was probably fine. After all, I had been shy all my life, so this was not anything new.

Second semester of my freshman year, I took a class that was in a giant lecture hall filled with over three hundred students. They told us that if we got to class early, we had to sit in the middle of the rows rather than the outside, so students who came in later didn't have to climb over us. I hated this policy. I always try to sit near the edge or the back of the room because I hate having people on all sides of me. It makes me feel trapped. But I hate being late even more.

One day, I was sitting in the middle of the row, watching the room fill up as I waited for class to start. As I sat there, a random thought occurred to me: *if there was a fire, how would all of us get out of here?* My heart started to race, and I couldn't breathe, as if there really was a fire eating up the oxygen in the room. I pictured the hundreds of students trying to race out the two

sets of double doors, tripping over seats and getting trampled as they tried to flee. I nearly got up and left the room before the lecture began, just to avoid the chance that my nightmare would come true. At that moment, however, the professor walked in and started lecturing. Now that I had something else to focus on, my fear evaporated. The spots in my vision cleared and I was able to pretend that nothing had happened, although deep down I knew that that was not normal.

Later, I googled the symptoms and came up with an answer for what had happened to me that day: panic attack. I knew that normal people didn't have panic attacks from sitting in a crowded lecture hall, but even then, I pretended I was fine. It wasn't until I had another, much more severe panic attack about a year later that I found out that I had social anxiety, and finally sought help.

You might ask why it took me twenty years to realize that about myself. The answer is that I didn't realize that many of the things I did and the fears I carried with me every day weren't normal. When you've only ever lived inside your own head, it doesn't occur to you that anyone else's brain works any differently. It is only now, in hindsight, that I can look back and say that those habits of my childhood—not wanting to speak up in class, nearly passing out when I had to give a speech, being afraid to go to the grocery store—were symptoms of social anxiety.

One of my best friends, who also has anxiety, refers to her anxious feelings as the anxiety monster. I imagine the anxiety monster as a thing that lurks in the shadows of your peripheral vision, a beast with glowing eyes and dripping fangs that attacks when you're at your weakest. It's like the monster that hid in your closet or under your bed during your childhood, except it is all grown-up, and is no longer relegated to the darkness. It is something that is always there, sometimes breathing down your back, and other times just out of sight, though you can still feel its eyes on you. Fear of the anxiety monster is nearly as debilitating as the anxiety monster itself,

because you never know what might cause it to pounce. That fear makes you feel helpless, because the anxiety monster seems so inescapable. It seems no matter what you do, you cannot shake it.

Since I started college, I had wanted to study abroad, and by my sophomore year, I was fairly certain I wanted to go to Scotland. Realizing that I had social anxiety felt like a death knell to that dream. My first response to realizing that I had a mental health issue was the overwhelming sense that I was broken. My brain, smart as it may have been, didn't work right. Its fight or flight response, designed for when humans had to outrun lions or bears to survive, was triggered by things like dining halls and class discussions. How was I going to survive living alone in a foreign country when I could barely make it through life in the one I grew up in?

By my junior year of college, I had worked through a lot of my social anxiety through therapy. I still felt anxious from time to time, but not nearly as often, and it wasn't nearly as debilitating as it once was. I learned how to calm myself down when I felt anxious, and to take breaks rather than just push through from one stressful thing to the next. I learned to keep the anxiety monster at bay. Life in Austin wasn't nearly so stressful for me anymore, and I felt healthier than I ever had before. But I worried what might happen if I went abroad. The short move to college had triggered some of the worst anxiety I had ever had; how much worse would it be if I moved to Scotland?

At the same time, I felt like I had something to prove. I felt like I had let the anxiety monster win my freshman year of college, and after a few years of training, I felt like I was ready for a rematch. More than that, I knew that there was so much to learn from going abroad, from living in an unfamiliar country and playing at being a local. I had so many questions about Scottish culture that I wanted answers to, answers that I couldn't get from reading books and

articles. Freshman year, I had let so many opportunities pass me by because of my uncontrolled social anxiety, and I wasn't about to let it take this from me as well.

Chapter 4- Layers of Scottish History

It's funny what your brain flags as noteworthy. When I arrived in Edinburgh in January 2020, I was surprised by how much of the city I remembered from my first visit to the city five years before. In those five years, I had changed. Edinburgh had not.

That first visit, my family and I had stayed in an Airbnb at the base of Castle Rock, where Edinburgh Castle sits overlooking the city. I spent quite a bit of time during that trip sitting by our front window staring up at the castle, etching the scene into my memory. When I returned, the castle, up on its stark black rock, looked the same as it had years before. The Royal Mile was as I remembered it, with its medieval stone buildings along a cobblestone street with row after row of souvenir shops and pubs. Even the graffiti-laden red phone booth was as I saw it in my mind's eye. It felt as though I had left only a few days before, the memories as vivid and new as a freshly painted landscape. It was like picking back up with an old friend that you hadn't seen in a long while.

My mom came with me to Scotland to help me settle in during my first week in the country. In that time, between all my orientation events and getting me settled in my dorm, we had little time to go sightseeing. We knew we had to make our few hours of free time count.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked me on her next-to-last day in the city. When she asked, I knew exactly what to say.

Besides the memory of the Royal Mile, the image that I remembered most was of the gardens behind the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The Palace of Holyroodhouse is a Georgian-looking palace at the base of the Royal Mile, which has housed many of Scotland's monarchs. It is the official royal residence of the Queen when she visits Edinburgh, as she does every

summer. I remembered little about the palace itself, especially its interior, but I remembered the gardens.

The gardens behind the palace were the place that I saw Arthur's Seat for the first time. The majestic hill is part of the ruins of the volcano which once stood where Edinburgh sits today. It beckoned to me even on my first visit to Edinburgh. My family didn't have time to hike there on that trip, but I swore to myself that when I came back, I was going to climb it. When I studied abroad in Scotland, my dorm sat five minutes from the base of the hill, making it easy to fulfill the promise I had made to myself years before. I came to think of the hill sort of like my guardian angel, because it was one of the landmarks that helped me find my way in the city. Wherever I was in Edinburgh, I knew that I just had to head towards Arthur's Seat and eventually I'd make it home.

Aside from Arthur's Seat, what I remembered most from our first visit was the ruins of Holyrood Abbey, a chapel behind the Palace. When I stepped inside it with my mother that day five years later, I felt as though I was stepping back in time.

Today, the Abbey is only ruins, its stone exterior a broken eggshell. The roof is missing, and the columns that once held it aloft have fallen. The pews and the altar are gone, and the floor is now covered in gravel, which was collecting puddles in the rain that day. What was once a stained-glass window over the altar is now a geometric stone cutout. When I first visited the site with my family on a sunny summer day, the blue sky streamed in unhindered through the holes where the glass once was. I thought the chapel looked better that way, without the garish colors of the glass. That day five years later, the sky was grey, but the effect was no less striking.

The chapel is now unusable as a place of worship, and hadn't been used for that purpose for centuries, but standing there, I still felt like I was on holy ground. Something about the simplicity of the ruins seemed to illicit reverence. They didn't demand it, the way heavily decorated cathedrals did. I once visited the Vatican in Rome, and was overwhelmed by the bright colors of the paintings on the walls, the rich details of the carvings on the altar, and the copious amounts of gold coating nearly everything. The purpose of all that decoration was to cause the worshiper to feel humble. And it worked, like a gun to the head. Holyrood Abbey was nothing like that. The structure was stripped of all its decorations, even beyond the bare essentials that made a church a church. No altar, no pews, no stained glass. No roof. And yet, I felt humbled by it all the same.

Our audio tour told the legend of how Holyrood Abbey came to be. It said that King David I, one of the early kings of Scotland, was hunting there one day in the 12th century, long before any buildings stood on the spot ("Holyrood"). He came upon a stag standing there, with a cross—called a rood in ancient Scotland—floating between its antlers. The king took it as a sign that that place was holy ground, and ordered that an abbey be built on the spot. The palace was added later, and the royalty that lived there used the abbey as a place of worship for centuries. Eventually, the abbey fell into disrepair, and became the ruins it is today, even as the Palace continues to be used as a royal residence.

Holyrood Abbey, then, could be considered an Ebenezer in the classic sense of the term. It was built to mark the spot as holy. Whether anyone believes this origin story is irrelevant. Fact or fiction, the story is part of the history of the place, a legend that seems inextricable from the landscape. Likely it was the story as much as the place itself that lodged Holyrood Abbey in my memory. It was the enchantment I felt about the place that drew me back all those years later.



Visiting the same place several years later gave me the chance to think about all the ways I had changed in the interim. The first time I went to Scotland, I was sixteen, a naïve high-school student who thought she had to be the smartest person in the room to earn any kind of approval, and who was too anxious to go to the grocery store alone. The second, I was nearly twenty-one, still idealistic but wiser, not so concerned about playing a part in order to please everyone, and not so likely to spiral into a panic attack at the grocery store. I liked to think that Holyrood Abbey would have been proud of the way I had grown in the time I'd been away.

Edinburgh held a few memories from my previous visit, but it didn't feel as bogged down with my past as Austin did. It wasn't burdened by the weight of all of my memories, good and bad. The memories it did carry were only snapshots from a family vacation. They were bright and clean and didn't feel heavy. They weren't memories I had to overcome. Edinburgh, for me, could be a clean slate, a place where I didn't have to relive my entire life whenever I walked down the street.

Of course, Edinburgh has a much longer history than the city of Austin does. It is burdened with its own type of history, but almost none of it is mine.



During my first week in Edinburgh, I bought a University of Edinburgh sweatshirt (called a jumper in the UK) that says "established in 1583." I bought it partially because I liked the green color of the sweatshirt (I like to think it brings out my eyes), but also because it made me laugh to think that the University of Edinburgh was nearly two hundred years older than the United States.

In school, we act as though American history starts in 1492. We pretend nothing significant happened on American soil until the white settlers arrived from Europe and started building the colonies that would later become the United States, as if these settlers were building on a clean slate. I guess it is easier to pretend than it is to face reality.

The colonization of the Americas involved innumerable unforgiveable cruelties. One that hits me deeply is the total disregard for the Native Americans' land and the stories it encompassed. When we wiped the slate clean, killing most of the Native Americans and driving the rest off of their homelands, we erased all the stories and all the memories that dwelt in their land. We trampled their Ebenezers and replaced them with cities. We took the land they had viewed as sacred and built strip malls on it. We didn't bother learning about the history of the places or collecting their stories to at least keep the culture from being forgotten.

Perhaps that is why we don't teach the history of the Americas before the white man. We never bothered to learn it in the first place.



What struck me about Europe was how ancient their history was. When US history was just beginning, European history was already centuries old.

Once, my family went to Italy and climbed the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The staircase spiraling to the top of the belltower would have been dizzying even without the tower's noticeable tilt. What I remember most about the experience was the groove worn into the stone stairs by hundreds and thousands of feet over the centuries since the tower was built. The deep divot in the stone made it impossible not to imagine all the people who had walked there before

me. I was aware that while the moment was unforgettable to me, it was just another day in the long history of the Leaning Tower.

Edinburgh has that ancient feel that all European cities seem to have. Walking down the street, you feel as though you've stepped back in time. Like in Pisa, I knew that I was walking where generations upon generations of people had walked before me. I never felt that way when I walked through Austin. You could trace Austin's history back to a starting point. With Edinburgh, that was no easy feat. The city felt like it had always been there, and perhaps always would be.

I couldn't help but think about all the things that Edinburgh had lived through over the centuries: plagues and Jacobite uprisings and World Wars, intellectual revolutions and festivals and technological advancements. Edinburgh had histories lost to time, not because they had been wiped out, but because they were so ancient that history books couldn't stretch back far enough to capture them. My time there, while significant to me, was just another layer of history in the place. I was one of millions of people who had passed through the city over the centuries, one whose history would likely be forgotten by the city as soon as I left

Chapter 5- The Stories Scotland is Built on

On George IV Bridge leading up to the Royal Mile, there is a coffeeshop with a garish red-orange front and a brass sign in the shape of an elephant hanging over the sidewalk. The shop is always packed, and there is always a handful of tourists taking pictures out front. For the first few days, I wondered why so many people wanted to take a picture in front of such an ugly storefront. That is, until I looked up above the huge window and read the gold letters painted there, proclaiming the coffeeshop as “the birthplace of Harry Potter.”

The guidebooks will tell you that the Elephant House is the coffeeshop where JK Rowling turned what was once an idea written on a napkin into what is now one of the most famous franchises in our lifetimes. I can only guess at how many tourists stop there to have a cup of coffee or a scone and bask in Ms. Rowling’s greatness. I suppose I have no right to be snide about it, since I once bought a cup of coffee and a scone there, but I swear it was for literary research.

I passed the shop often, since it was less than a block from the university, on the way to the heart of the city. More than once, I heard a local tell a tourist taking pictures there that Harry Potter wasn’t actually born there. He couldn’t have been, because the Elephant House wasn’t there at the time when JK Rowling was writing the first book. The real birthplace of Harry Potter was a coffeeshop around the corner, called The Spoon or something like that. That coffeeshop, the locals said, was owned by JK Rowling’s cousin (or brother-in-law, or friend, or someone), who would have been more than happy to let the author occupy one of their tables for hours on end, buying little and writing much. Although Rowling may have written parts of *Harry Potter* at the Elephant House, and has done several interviews there over the years, it was not what it claimed to be.

So much of Scotland's history seems to be based on stories of questionable accuracy. The Elephant House is a prime example of that. Whether or not Harry Potter was born there, jumping from JK Rowling's head like Athena from Zeus, there is a history constructed around that place. The truth of it seems to be as irrelevant as the origin story for Holyrood Abbey. While locals in wide swaths seem to dismiss the Elephant House's claim as a falsehood, it seems that no one has tried to make the Elephant House admit that it is a lie. No one has tried to redirect the entire stream of tourists away from that coffeeshop. Then again, maybe what the locals say about the Elephant House is as inaccurate as what the Elephant House claims. Maybe it is all a falsehood.



In middle school and high school, I thought of history as the one true story of what happened in the past. In class, history was presented as an unquestionable timeline, a list of events and dates that we could be tested on. In college, however, I soon learned that this is not the way the study of history works. Our teachers before treated history as unquestionable for simplicity's sake, not because history was beyond debate. Everything, in fact, was questionable. History is a story just like any other, and there are countless ways to tell it. Some of my favorite bits of history are the ones that involve some amount of mystery and disagreement about what happened.

The dorm where I lived in Edinburgh was less than five minutes from the base of Arthur's Seat, one of the most iconic spots in Edinburgh, which boasts a panoramic view of the city. People are divided on how the hill got its name. Some scholars say that it came from the Scottish Gaelic name for the place, Àrd-na-Said, which was gradually anglicized into Arthur's Seat (O'Neill). Others say that it was once believed to be the seat of the legendary King Arthur who, contrary to popular belief, was a Celtic and not an English king (O'Neill). Both of these

stories about the name's origin tell you something about Scottish culture. The first relates to the language of the Scottish Highlands, while the second relates to the mythology of the land. To me, it doesn't matter which one is true. You get a much broader understanding when there is more than one possible explanation.

Much of Scotland's history relies on stories; its culture is built on them. Take the kilt for instance, one of the aspects most people think of when they think of Scotland. The stereotype is not unfounded. Scotsmen proudly wear kilts on special occasions such as weddings or festivals like Burns' Night. One of my Scottish friends turned twenty-one on the same day I did and got his first kilt as a birthday gift that year. Apparently, kilts are wildly expensive, and are often rented like tuxedos are. No matter where a Scotsman is from, whether the Lowlands or the Highlands, a kilt is considered part of their cultural dress, one they embrace with gusto.

This wasn't always the case. Historically, kilts were only worn by the Scottish Highlanders, a Gaelic group of people related to the Irish. After the Jacobite Rising of 1745, in which a large number of Gaelic Highlanders fought against the English monarch's forces, the kilts were outlawed in an attempt to suppress Highland culture. The English's goal was to tame the Highlanders, whom they saw as wild, barbarous, and violent. It wasn't until Sir Walter Scott penned his historical fiction novels about the Scottish Highlands, painting a romantic picture of the clans, that the kilt was adopted by Scottish culture as a whole. Because of the popularity of Scott's version of Scotland, the ban on the kilt was lifted, leading to the abundance of kilt-wearing Scots today.

Sir Walter Scott's stories helped shape modern Scottish culture. He and other writers are largely responsible for the romanticized view that many hold of Scotland, one of kilted warriors

charging across vast green landscapes to the sound of the bagpipes. It is difficult not to buy into this view, which is still being recreated by writers today.

Diana Gabaldon, the author of the *Outlander* series, is one of Scott's modern equivalents, in terms of the romanticization of Scotland's history. Her novels—part romance, part historical fiction, part fantasy—build on the groundwork that Scott laid. The books paint a picturesque view of the Highlands and the history of the clans who lived there, painting the Highlands as a beautiful but dangerous place filled with adventure and romance. Although I have heard that her stories are historically accurate, most readers do not fall in love with the books for Gabaldon's faithfulness to Scottish history. They fall in love with the romanticism of the Highlands and of the Highlanders.

The adaptation of the *Outlander* novels into a TV show has only amplified their effect. Google Scotland, and you'll find *Outlander*-inspired itineraries. Google Scottish Gaelic, and you'll come across phrases characters use in the books or the show. At many souvenir shops around Scotland, you can buy *Outlander*-inspired gifts for the obsessed. The series has generated much interest in Scotland, and has created a market for fans.

The Scots don't seem to mind this *Outlander*-mania. In fact, the proliferation of *Outlander*-themed tours and souvenirs suggests that they are embracing its popularity. They cater to these fans who flock to Scotland wanting to experience the real nation where the stories are set, and to learn more about the true history behind them. The Scots seem to love this interest in their culture, no matter the reason for it. They also don't mind the ways that Gabaldon, Scott, and others romanticize their country and its history in fiction. Often, they encourage it. Sometimes, they adapt reality to come closer to this fiction, as with the kilt.



The significance of stories to Scottish culture is not lost on the Scots, so they make a point of celebrating their most famous authors.

Despite JK Rowling's history in Edinburgh, she was not born in Scotland. She was born in England, which means she is not a Scot. The Scots make no attempt to claim her as such, despite the ways they unapologetically cater to Harry Potter fans. They have many native writers that they choose to celebrate instead, often in grand ways.

Sir Walter Scott, one of the most famous novelists in Scottish history and the inventor of the historical fiction novel, is one of them. Edinburgh's train station, Waverley Station, is named after one of his most famous novels. Down the street from the station is the Scott Monument, a gargantuan gothic monstrosity that cuts a unique silhouette against the sunset. Every town and every house Scott ever lived in is now touted as a tourist attraction. The Scots are well-aware of how much Scott has shaped their culture and the way that the rest of the world perceives them, and they make every effort to recognize him for his impact.

Despite Scott's undeniable influence on Scotland, he is not the nation's most celebrated writer. That honor goes to Robert Burns, a poet who is often called the Bard of Scotland. Robbie Burns, as he is sometimes known, is the only writer that I know of who gets his own holiday. Burns' birthday, January 25th, is still celebrated across Scotland, even hundreds of years after his death ("Burns' Night"). On that night, dozens of groups across the city host celebrations in Burns' honor. Tickets sell out long before the 25th, a fact I learned firsthand. I didn't get to go to any Burns' Night celebrations, but I did pass groups of Scots on the streets that night wearing their finest clothes—the women in long evening gowns and the men in kilts and suitcoats with

tails. The celebrations involve feasts serving haggis, neaps, and tatties (Scotland's national dish: haggis, turnips, and potatoes), ceilidhs (Scottish dances, pronounced "kay-lees"), and recitations of Burns' poems. Burns' "Ode to a Haggis" is recited before said dish is served, and the evening closes with perhaps Burns' most famous work, "Auld Lang Sine."

I knew "Auld Lang Sine," as many Americans do, because it is played on New Years' Eve to say goodbye to the old year and ring in the new. Before, I thought of it as a somber tune because of the melancholy way it is often played in the US. I learned that that is not at all how Scots think of the song.

One evening while I was in Edinburgh, I went to a ceilidh at a bar with a group of friends. The experience was akin to going two-stepping in Texas. The band would say the name of the dance, how many people you needed in your group (sometimes you needed a partner, sometimes you needed three or four people), and would explain the steps one by one before they played the song at full speed. When the band announced a two-step, I told the friend I was dancing with that I knew how to do it, since we had two-steps back home. After the song was over, I told him that it turns out I do not know how to two-step, at least the way the Scots do it.

At the end of the night, as the band was finishing up, they announced that they were going to end with "Auld Lang Sine." The song is an appropriate way to end any event in Scotland. Everyone on the dance floor formed a huge circle, crossing their arms and joining hands. When my friend took my hand, he asked if I knew the words. I told him I only knew some of them, a fact that seemed to shock him. The band started playing the song the way I was used to, slow and contemplative, as the crowd swayed back and forth and sang along. As the song went on, though, the band started to pick up speed like a rock rolling downhill. The crowd started singing louder and faster. As the music reached a crescendo, the crowd broke free from their

circle, unable to contain their excitement any longer. They screamed the words and jumped around wildly to the music as if they were at a rave, twirling dizzily to the rapid pace of the music. I was the only one who seemed the least bit surprised by how the song ended.



Stories in their various forms—from poems turned into songs, to novels that weave false histories, to legends that define the significance of a place—are central to Scottish culture. From “Auld Lang Sine” to the kilt, from the Elephant House to Arthur’s Seat, stories shape every aspect of Scottish culture. They guide how the world views Scotland, and how the Scots view themselves.

It is no mystery why a writer like me, who loves stories more than I can explain, would feel so at home there.

Chapter 6- A Literary Controversy

It was a story that brought me to Scotland in the first place, a story whose basis in fact was questionable at best.

My freshman year of college, I took a Plan II seminar called Introduction to British Studies, where we read several works of literature from the UK and Ireland. Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* was one of them. The work that stuck out to me most that semester was a set of poems called the Ossian cycle. Allegedly, the poems were from an ancient Scottish Gaelic manuscript, discovered and translated into English by a Scotsman named James Macpherson. The poems were said to be composed by Ossian, a Highland bard who seemed to be the Scottish Gaelic version of Homer (MacLachlan). Only fragments of the bard's poems had survived, Macpherson said, but he had translated as much as he could.

Until that point, I had never liked poetry. In fact, there were times in my life when I would have gone so far as to say I hated poetry. I never could figure out what a poem was supposed to be saying; I got so tangled up in the flowery figurative language that I couldn't figure out the point underneath it all. This irritated me to no end. To me, reading a poem was like wandering in a cornfield maze that went in circles, rather than having a path that led from one place to another. But I loved the Ossian poems instantly. Probably because there was a story in all of it, and an adventure story to boot.

Scott wasn't the only writer who created a romanticized view of the Highlands in his stories. The Ossian poems told of heroes and dragons and quests, of jealous queens and valiant warriors, of rolling green landscapes and crashing seas. As a young girl, I had a phase where I read fantasy novels almost exclusively. Even now, I am likely to pick up almost any book that

involves a castle, a quest, some sword-fighting, and a little magic. The Ossian poems fit snugly into my literary niche.

My reaction to the Ossian poems confirmed two things that I was already sure of about myself. The first was that I was a romantic that loved a good adventure story. The second was that I was more than a little gullible.

In class, our professor told us that the Ossian poems were an 18th century hoax. Macpherson hadn't found an ancient Scottish Gaelic manuscript; the ancient Gaels were a largely illiterate people. He had forged the poems, making up the story about discovering the manuscript on a trip to his native Highlands. He was allegedly so dedicated to the ruse that he had written the poems in English, translated them into Scottish Gaelic, then translated them back to English so that he could show people as he was making progress with his translation (Britannica). Many people, like me, believed him. The poems were a sensation, read by the same people who bought into Scott's presentation of the Highlands (MacLachlan). It was even said that Napoleon used to carry a copy of the Ossian poems on his conquests (Johnston). However, it wasn't long before people started to get suspicious. Samuel Johnson was one of the most vocal of these critics. He went so far as to tour the Scottish Highlands himself to prove that no such poems existed anywhere in Scotland (MacLachlan). Eventually, academics called Macpherson's bluff, revealing the poems to be a forgery.

You might think that the fact that the poems were forged would ruin them for me. In fact, the controversy surrounding the poems made me love them even more, adding another level of interest to the tales of warriors' quests through the moody Scottish Highlands.

Scholars are divided on Macpherson's motives for trying to pass off his own poems as an ancient Scottish Gaelic manuscript. Many believe he had selfish motives for it, claiming that he did it for the money and the fame (a literature professor I had at the University of Edinburgh was solidly in this camp). They claimed that he did it to make a name for himself in the literary world, which had ignored his earlier works (Mulholland 393). Some, however, said he did it out of an attempt to elevate the culture of his native Highlands, one that was being crushed out under English rule. He saw that the Gaelic culture he had grown up in was at risk of disappearing, especially where the oral tradition of poetry was concerned (McKean 448). He wanted to prove to the world that the Scottish Gaelic people had something to contribute to the world of art and knowledge, that they weren't the violent, barbaric warriors that the English claimed they were. Some of these scholars go so far as to suggest that his work was more a matter of overzealous editing than downright forgery, treating his methods as legitimate fieldwork (McKean 447). Unsurprisingly, I was inclined to believe Macpherson did it to save his culture, rather than to make a name for himself. There was no way to know Macpherson's true motives, and likely they weren't black and white. But I thought the more noble motive made for a better story.

Whether Macpherson was trying to save the Gaelic language or not, his forgeries did spark interest in the poetry of the Scottish Highlands. Collectors started traveling to the Highlands to record the Gaelic poems that had been transmitted orally for generations. By that time, the oral tradition of the Highlands was dying out. Without these collectors' efforts, many Scottish Gaelic poems and songs that survive today would have disappeared with the oral culture. So, in a way, Macpherson did help to save Gaelic poetry and elevate the status of the Gaelic Highlanders on the world stage (McKean 460).

It was the Ossian controversy that sparked my interest in Scotland, specifically in the culture of the Highlands. I wrote my final paper in that seminar class about the Ossian controversy, arguing that Macpherson did it to save his Highland culture. As it often does, the research begot more questions than it did answers.

I was intrigued by the idea that someone would forge an epic in order to elevate the status of their country. I couldn't imagine that level of national pride. I couldn't imagine feeling so overlooked and unappreciated by the world that you would go to the trouble to fake a translation that might convince the world to take your nation's culture seriously. It made me think that there was something unique about how proud Scotland is of its history and its culture, despite how overlooked it is on the world stage.

The research led me to the discovery that Scottish Gaelic is an endangered language. Although I knew languages could die, as Latin had, I had never considered the stages leading from a living, thriving language to one that no one remembered how to speak. Although the words referring to the state of a language—living, endangered, extinct—drew a metaphorical connection between languages and living things, do not just die. They aren't like bison or blue whales or dodo birds. So how did languages go extinct? And why?

I also wondered about the real literary tradition of the Highlands. There was some speculation in the scholarship about how much of Macpherson's poetry was based on genuine Gaelic poetry. Ossian was made up, but there were real bards who lived in the Scottish Highlands amongst the clans, telling legends of old. I wanted to track down those poems and learn as much about them as I could, while also learning about the Scottish Gaelic language. And what better place to do that than in Scotland?

Section II: Independence

Chapter 7- Alone Abroad

“How do we get to your dorm from here?” my mother asked on our second day in Edinburgh. We were standing in front of Teviot, the student union at the University of Edinburgh. It was only a few blocks from our hotel in Edinburgh, which was our home base until I moved into my dorm a few days later. I was glad my mother had done enough research to book us a hotel that close to the university. Of all the things I was worried about in moving across the ocean for a semester, figuring out where our hotel was relative to the university was not high on my list of priorities. Luckily, she had thought that part through.

“I don’t know,” I said. The map of the university that I had in front of me, already limp from being out in the rain, was a spiderweb of unlabeled streets and greyed-out areas. The university buildings, marked in red, were scattered across it like ladybugs caught in the spider’s trap. It didn’t help that I wasn’t used to Edinburgh’s take on January. Every gust of wind made me shiver, which made the map even more difficult to decipher.

“Let’s ask somebody,” my mother said.

One cliché that bothers me is that whenever a man and a woman get lost in movies, the man is always the one staring at the map while the woman says, “Why can’t you just stop and ask for directions?” As a woman, I will tell you that my first solution to any problem has never once been “let’s ask somebody.”

That ire may be the feminist in me, but it may also be due to my social anxiety. Although I am much more comfortable in interactions now than I once was, I still go to great lengths to avoid asking somebody if other options are available. I prefer exhausting all other options before going off to ask someone for help, because asking someone is so stressful. After all, that is what

Google was invented for. At that point, two days after our arrival in Edinburgh, I had no phone plan and hadn't figured out how to log in to the university Wi-Fi yet, so Google was not an option. Even so, I was not about to ask somebody. Instead, I was going to stick to my go-to plan of figuring it out myself.

Put simply, my mother is wired differently. While I was struggling with the damp map, she walked off to the university store, across the road from Teviot, and asked somebody.

For the record, I would like to point out two things. First of all, if given a little more time with the map, I would probably have worked out how to get there. Second, the route that the man in the store told us was the most confusing one possible; once I figured out where my dorm was, I never took that route again.



I told myself that I only invited my mom along to help me get all my suitcases across the Atlantic. I knew from our previous trip that Scotland was cold, and so I needed to pack a lot of layers, more than I could fit into the two suitcases and one carry-on that the airline allotted to me. In reality, though, I thought it was better to ease my way into the experience rather than jump off the high dive.

Having social anxiety means that social situations stress me out more than they do most people, because I am afraid that I will do something wrong and be embarrassed. After every interaction, I pore over every aspect of the conversation, trying to decide whether I unintentionally hurt someone's feelings or said something stupid. Sometimes I will stay awake late at night, thinking about some mistake I made years ago. New situations trigger all these responses more than familiar ones do. Going to a new restaurant, meeting a new person, or

getting lost on the way to somewhere new make me anxious. I knew that every day in Scotland would be filled with new experiences. Those first few days, my schedule would be packed with situations that could trigger a panic attack, ones that would make the anxiety monster descend on me like a vulture. Once I got settled, I figured I would be fine, but I had to make it through the first week.

My anxiety isn't nearly so bad when I have someone with me who can help me out if I get stuck. Usually, I don't actually need them to step in, but knowing that someone has my back makes me feel more confident and in control. Practically speaking, I didn't need my mother there with me. I could unpack my things, buy a SIM card for my phone, and find my way to class on my own. I didn't need her to do these things for me. But I needed her there for emotional support.

Going to Scotland on my own was an attempt to wean myself off of that need, which clashed with my desire for independence. I so badly wanted to be able to do things on my own, to be able to step into any situation without panicking. By that point, I could handle maybe 85% of situations just fine. But I wanted to teach myself to handle the other 15%. I wanted to be completely independent.

Still, I knew that wasn't something I could jump right into. Freshman year of college taught me that. Instead, I would ease my way into it, building myself a foundation before trying to do everything alone. I knew my mom couldn't stay there forever, and eventually I would have to learn to do things on my own in Scotland. But I also knew I didn't have to start off alone.



Living in a dorm room in Edinburgh was the first time I had ever lived on my own, without my family or roommates. In the UK, sharing a room with someone is unheard of. Every student in the dorm had their own room, an idea that was mindboggling to me. Not having a roommate to bother or be bothered by opened up so many possibilities. There was no one to bother if I wanted to sleep in every morning and stay up until 2am every night. Or, conversely, if I woke up at 6am and went to bed at 10pm. The second option was much more likely for me. I could listen to my music without headphones, without my roommate complaining about my music taste. I could study in my room anytime. And, I realized, I could stay out all night on a school night, and no one would ever know.

I wouldn't do that. But it was thrilling to think that I could.

On the flip side, I realized that this also meant that no one would notice if I didn't come home one night. No one would notice if I stopped going to class. No one would notice if I disappeared. How long would it take before someone realized that I had gone missing? If I got into trouble, how long would it take before someone started looking for me?

The price you have to pay for independence is having to stand alone. You can make all your own choices without answering to anyone. But if you get into trouble, the only person that can get you out of it is you. If you have a problem, you have to figure out how to solve it on your own. If disaster falls, you have to deal with it alone.

I felt this tension acutely. I wondered if there was a way to get all the good things out of being independent without all the bad. Perhaps there are ways to strike a balance. But not when you are 4,688 miles from home ("Flight Time").



I never admitted to anyone how difficult my freshman year of college was for me. My way of coping was often to go home. My first semester, I cried every time I had to leave my parents' house to go back to UT. If I wasn't so stubborn and so afraid of being called a failure, I might have dropped out. It was pride that stopped me. I couldn't bear the idea of admitting that I couldn't handle it and letting everyone down.

Going to Scotland felt like my first real test of being an independent, grown-up human being. My parents were no longer going to be a thirty-minute drive away, able to bail me out at a moment's notice. Instead, I was going to be an ocean away, in a country where I knew no one. If I happened to slip and fall on campus, I couldn't just make the fifteen-minute walk from campus to my mom's medical practice to make sure that I hadn't broken my elbow, like I had freshman year (I did not, in fact, break my elbow, but I had huge bruises on both my biceps for weeks. And I learned an important lesson that day: the granite steps leading up to the UT Tower are slippery when it rains. Who knew?). If I had a bad day, I couldn't go home and get a hug from my mom or snuggle with my dog until everything was ok (that happened a lot freshman year, less after that). I couldn't pop home for dinner or to do a load of laundry (again, this didn't happen often, but occasionally I got tired of dorm food. And once you've walked back to your room with your nice clean load of laundry and found someone else's underwear buried in your pile of clothes, you really start to appreciate what a luxury it is to have your own washing machine). I was on my own. If I had a problem, I had to solve it myself. Perhaps with a little bit of help from my dear friend Google.

After how difficult my freshman year had been, I felt like I had something to prove. No only to the world, but to myself. I had to prove that I could be independent, that I could stand

alone. That I didn't need to run home to my parents every time something went wrong. That I could live on my own.

Chapter 8- Feminism and Independence

All students at UT who were studying abroad in the spring had to go to pre-departure orientation the semester before we left. One of the sessions was about health and safety abroad. It should have been titled “Everything that Could Possibly Go Wrong in a Foreign Country.” They covered everything from getting lost to having a medical emergency to being coerced into becoming a spy by foreign agents.

In part of the presentation, the speaker said, “What would you do if you went out to eat on your first night, then the next morning you woke up with food poisoning, and you didn’t know anyone who could come and help take care of you?”

When someone suggested going to the doctor, he said, “Ok, but what if you were throwing up and were too weak to get out of bed?”

Someone suggested calling the international helpline, to get them to take you to the hospital. To this, he said, “Ok, but what if your phone was out of battery, and you hadn’t picked up an adapter to be able to charge it?”

Someone suggested trying to get up and take yourself to the hospital, to which the speaker said, “What if you tried to do that, but when you got out of bed you were too weak to make it across the room, and on your way, you fell and hit your head and passed out?”

To this the girl in front of me murmured, “I’d just curl up and die.”

I agreed. To me, it seemed like a catch-22, a situation you had to try to prevent from the start. All you had to do was make sure that you didn’t eat anything questionable, that you had an adapter to be able to charge your phone in international power sockets, and that you had bought

medications to treat the symptoms of food poisoning. It sounded avoidable enough to me. And, even in the worst-case scenario, I was going to be living in a dorm, so there was bound to be someone close by who would find me (eventually) and help me out.

When I was learning to drive at fifteen, my dad would often take me out to practice. As I drove, he would ask me things like “what would you do if you blew a tire right now? What would you do if that truck pulled out in front of you? What would you do if it was wet and you started hydroplaning?”

Usually, my first response would be “panic, probably.” Then I would go on and tell him what the driving course had told me to do in those situations. My dad never thought my panic joke was funny. I thought it was hilarious, because it was true. I figured I would probably do the right thing if something went wrong, but that didn’t mean that I wouldn’t freak out in the process. I figured the same would be true if anything went wrong while I was in Scotland. I would be fine in the end, but that didn’t mean I wouldn’t panic in the interim.



In Austin, my roommates and I often make jokes about being strong, independent women. The punchline is that we often don’t feel as though we are strong, independent women, even though we want to be. As a result, we often exercise our independence in seemingly silly ways, like one time when my roommate and I went to Walgreens and ended up buying a stuffed animal each, just because we could.

Women throughout history have had to deal with figuring out how to be independent, express their opinions, and live according to their own desires. It is shocking to me to consider that women in the US only gained the right to vote a hundred years ago, or that a few generations

ago, I wouldn't have been allowed to go to a foreign country by myself because I was a woman. Women have been treated as subordinate and dependent on men for most of history. I have spoken to people who have said their mothers couldn't hold a job after getting married because they were expected to stay home and care for the house, and who couldn't get a credit card in their own name because they weren't men.

These stories surprise me because I grew up with the expectation that I would have a career of my own even after I got married. My mother is a doctor, and has worked all my life. I didn't realize that was anything but universal for a long time. Both of my parents always encouraged me to do well in school so I could go to college and get a good job once I graduated. The emphasis was never on me getting married to a man who could support me; it was always on me being able to support myself. For a long time, it didn't occur to me how different this was from the expectations set for women a few generations ago.

As a result, I didn't think feminism was an issue until I got to college and started learning about things like pay gaps and how unsupportive the US is with maternity leave in comparison to some other countries. I also had never really experienced sexism until college; at least, I had never been aware of it when I did. Growing up, I was used to being the smartest person in my class, and was used to everyone knowing what I was capable of. When I got to college, I realized that I had to prove myself to everyone. Apparently, being admitted to one of the best universities in the country—and to an honors program, at that—was sometimes not enough proof that I was as smart as my male peers, at least in their minds. I was used to people respecting my opinion and listening when I had something to say. I wasn't used to having to compete to get a chance to speak, or to having people be surprised when it turned out that I knew what I was talking about. I wasn't used to feeling like I had a steeper hill to climb to earn respect than my male peers did.

Once I started noticing it in the classroom, I started noticing it other places too. I went to the bank with my mother once. The banker, a man in a suit behind a meticulously clean desk, tried to convince me to set it up so that I would receive my monthly bank statements via email rather than in the mail because “there are mean people in this world who could reach into your mailbox and steal your bank statement.” I was twenty years old at the time, certainly old enough to understand that there were “mean people” in the world. I told him I would stick to the snail mail, thank you very much. He may have been right about the convenience aspect of having the statement emailed to me rather than sent to me in the mail, but I wasn’t about to let him know that.

Another time, I was backing out of the parking lot of the grocery store, and a young man walked out into the aisle. I slowed down, not wanting to hit him, and waited for him to move. Instead, he started directing me, as if I did not know how to back out of a parking spot in a wide aisle with no one but him around. When I told my roommate the story later, she said, “You got mansplained to and you didn’t even have to say anything!”

These slights seem minor, but they point to a common assumption that I don’t know anything, an assumption that irritates me. I have no problem with admitting the limits of my knowledge, and I know plenty of men and women who know more than I do, from whom I am glad to learn. The issue is when people are condescending. I get especially irritated when men are condescending because it suggests that they believe that women like me aren’t capable of understanding the world around them, much less take care of themselves in that world.

Part of the issue is that for thousands of years, women have been dependent on men as providers and protectors. All of us, men and women alike, have been raised in a culture with this idea passed down to us. Women have pushed back on this idea, especially in recent decades. We

don't need to be dependent on men; we can make it fine on our own. And we don't need men as protectors; often, men are the thing we need protection from. But many men are still raised that they should stand in that role of provider and protector, as if that is what they base their entire masculine identity on. I don't think there is anything wrong with men wanting to be providers and protectors, until that becomes the basis of their masculinity. When that is how they define themselves as men, they treat strong, independent, smart women as a threat to them. There is a fine line between being chivalrous and being condescending, and some men don't seem to understand that. They don't understand that what looks like a helpful gesture to them might feel undermining to a woman.

I think that one of the biggest obstacles to being a strong, independent woman has to do with safety. It is hard to act confident when a dimly lit parking garage could be your downfall. It is hard to act independent when walking down the street alone after dark is one of the first things you are taught not to do. It is hard to act as though you are in control when you have to answer the door with a baseball bat in hand if the doorbell rings at night, or pretend as if there is someone else at home if you are alone.

The fears that come with being a woman are so internalized that until recently, I didn't realize that men, by and large, don't have to live with this level of fear. Some do, such as minorities or gay men, but many will never know what it is like to live with that constant worry. Even fathers with daughters will never fully understand that fear or the frustration of being treated as if they are incompetent because they are female.



When I arrived in Scotland with my mom, the taxi driver from the airport told us that Edinburgh was one of the safest capital cities in Europe. He assured my mother and me that I would be alright in Edinburgh. His words didn't lull me into a false sense of security—I have been told there are mean people out in the world—but they were reassuring. Those fears followed me to Scotland, but, shockingly, I hardly ever felt unsafe there, even when I was on my own at night.

The sun sets at 3:30pm there in the winter, so I often had to walk home in the dark. Occasionally I had someone to walk with, but many times I walked alone. I walked quickly and kept my eyes and ears open, as I had been trained to do, but I never felt threatened. I stuck to familiar, well-lit streets and I never had any problems. In the two months I was there, I got catcalled once, in broad daylight when I was walking down by the ports in Leith, but I walked away quickly. I also had a guy in a car slow down as I was walking in Perth once and ask me if I wanted a ride. He didn't look threatening, but I knew better than to take my chances. I shook my head and kept walking, and he drove off. But those were minor occurrences, hardly the crises that could have happened.

Chapter 9- Overcoming Anxiety

My mom left Scotland on Sunday, the day before classes started. We said goodbye Saturday night, parting on the corner near my dorm. I knew that the next time I would see her in person would be during my younger sister's spring break in mid-March, when my parents and my sister would come to visit me, two and a half months later. Until then, the longest I had ever gone without seeing my family was two weeks. We planned to Skype every weekend, but that wasn't the same. As I walked away from her that day, I forced myself not to look back, terrified that if I did, I would beg her to take me back home with her.

I hadn't felt too anxious during that first week in Scotland. Once my mother left, though, I was alone and vulnerable. The anxiety monster saw an opening, and pounced. As a result, I spent most of that Sunday curled up in bed, crying.

In layman's terms, a panic attack is when you have so much accumulated anxiety that your body needs to get rid of it all at once. It feels like the anxiety monster has closed its jaws around your throat and is shaking you back and forth, the way a predator does to kill its prey. That's how I felt that Sunday. All the accumulated anxiety from the week had built up under the surface and had to be released.

I worried that I wouldn't make any friends. I worried that I'd hate every minute of my time in Scotland, that this experience I had been looking forward to for years wouldn't live up to my expectations. There were a million things that could go wrong in the five months I was going to be there. There were countless problems that could befall me that I didn't know how to solve, and everyone that I knew that could help me was over 4,000 miles away.

At dinnertime, I was faced with a choice. Since school hadn't started yet, the dining hall wasn't open for dinner that night, meaning I had to track down something else to eat. I imagined trying to go into a pub myself that evening for dinner, sitting at a table alone and ordering food, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible so that no one would talk to me. As wound up as I was, I knew that wouldn't go well. I contemplated skipping dinner, the way that I had so many nights freshman year. But then I realized that that would be letting the anxiety monster win, and I hate letting it win. I pulled myself out of bed and decided to go to the grocery store. Despite my fears, nothing went wrong—I got my food and didn't go to bed hungry. It didn't feel much like a victory, but I took what I could get.



The really frustrating thing about anxiety is it isn't something we can cure. We can treat it, we can control it, but we can't fix it. It never goes away. On a really bad day, you wonder if you will ever live a normal life. On a good day, you barely notice it, but even then, the anxiety monster lingers like a shadow. It's a lifelong war filled with battles and tense ceasefires, but you never sign a peace treaty.

My second week in Scotland, I remember walking down a crowded street and realizing that I didn't feel anxious at all. Back home, a street filled with strangers would have put me on high alert; I would have been bracing myself to fight off an anxiety attack at any moment. But I didn't feel that at all. In fact, I hadn't felt that in several days. Not when I was running late to class, not when I was sitting in the crowded library, not when I was trying to find a place to sit in the packed dining hall. Skipping dinner hadn't occurred to me after that first Sunday. It was as though the anxiety monster had evaporated without a trace. I had been under the impression that that was not how anxiety worked. I had expected that my anxiety would be worse in this

unknown land than it was back home, where, as stressful as life was, at least it was familiar. But that appeared to be anything but the case.

That feeling of peacefulness lingered the entire time I was in Scotland. There were stressful days, and things that triggered my anxiety, but not nearly as much or as often as I anticipated. I still cannot account for why. It may be that my schedule in Scotland wasn't as packed as it was back home, so I had less stress to begin with. Or it could be that I had become better at coping than I thought, and was in a much healthier place than I realized. I don't know what it was, but I savored the feeling. I wasn't used to feeling invincible, but that's how I felt in Scotland.

Chapter 10- Scottish Independence

When I traveled to Scotland, it was not only my own independence that was on my mind. Scotland has grappled with nationhood for centuries, trying to figure out its place in the world.

Scotland and England weren't always united into one country under one monarch. Centuries ago, Scotland and England were two separate nations, ones that fought constantly. The English have always had an eye for conquering lands that were not their own, and they saw their neighbor to the north as a perfect place to start. This led to conflict, as the Scots refused to be overtaken by the English. However, the monarchs of each country were often closely related, so closely that the Scottish monarchs were often in line for the British throne. This fact became relevant in 1603, when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England after Queen Elizabeth I of England died without an heir (Jones). Although this brought the two nations together under one crown, they were not yet one kingdom. King James I and VI tried to push for the union of the two nations, but Scotland resisted until the Act of Union in 1707.

It is easy to see why this union would benefit the English. The English were worried that a lack of a political union with the Scots would lead to war, given the longstanding alliance between France and Scotland against England (Murdoch). This alliance made Scotland a threat to them. The fact that the two nations had the same monarch made no difference. Scotland made it clear that they viewed themselves as an independent nation; they acted as though sharing a monarch with the English was temporary. Until the early 1700s, the Scots insisted that upon the death of Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch, Scotland would be able to choose its own monarch separate from the English (Murdoch). At that point, England and Scotland would part ways and go back to being completely independent of one another.

At first, the Scots were violently opposed to union, but eventually the tide changed. They began to see that merging the two nations would offer them protection and give the Scottish members of Parliament more power on the world stage (Murdoch). There were also economic issues to consider. At the time, Scotland was deep in debt, and the Scottish government soon realized that being a part of the much wealthier UK would help them overcome this debt (Glickman). In 1707, the Scottish Parliament approved the Act of Union. This dissolved the Scottish Parliament and gave the Scots seats in the British Parliament. It secured the English monarch as the monarch of Scotland, established free trade between the two nations, and allowed the Scots to settle in English colonies (Jones). This Act, along with similar acts of union with Ireland and Wales, brought about what is now the United Kingdom.

Ever since, Scotland has struggled with being part of the UK and with being British. Scotland has sometimes been described as a “stateless nation,” given its cultural independence from English, in contrast with its lack of political authority (Dekavalla). There have been rebellions, uprisings, and protests since the union, hoping to reestablish Scotland as an independent nation. These uprisings, including the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and of 1745, showed that the Act of Union did not get rid of the military threat the Scottish posed to the English (Murdoch). Scotland’s relationship with England was still riddled with conflict, a situation they shared with the other nations in the UK, especially Ireland. Ireland eventually became independent from the UK, likely inspiring Scotland to continue to fight for their own independence. All Scotland’s attempts to break with the UK so far have failed, yet the independence movement is still strong today.

The Scottish National Party has been a critical player in this struggle. It was established in the early 1900s, but it did not gain much traction on the political stage until the 1960s

(Dekavalla). Their power and influence in Scotland have only grown since then. By 2014, the SNP had been in power in the Scottish Parliament for eight years, which gave them leverage to call for an independence referendum (Dekavalla). The referendum asked the Scottish people to vote on whether or not Scotland should be an independent nation. As one would expect, the major reason for voting for Scottish independence was a sense of nationalism and pride in Scotland's cultural heritage. The reasons for remaining had to do with economic and national security concerns, such as whether Scotland's currency would have to change or what would happen with international security treaties (Dekavalla). When the votes were counted, the votes to remain won with 55% of the vote, a very small margin of victory (Breeze). For now, Scotland is still part of the UK.

That, however, was before Brexit, the landmark vote on whether the UK should remain in the European Union. Most of Scotland voted to stay in the EU (Guay). Meanwhile, the majority of England voted to leave, clinching the decision in an outcome that many found shocking. This result, as well as the fact that Scotland had no power to stop it, made Scotland angry.

The independence movement came up in a discussion in my Gaelic class while I was in Scotland. One Scottish girl in the class said that her parents had voted against leaving the UK in the 2014 referendum, but after Brexit, they are rethinking their choice. They are worried about what this will do to Scotland's economy, she said. From what I saw, that was a common sentiment.



Before arriving in Scotland, I was interested in the political landscape of Scotland (and this is from a girl who does not like politics). I was less interested in the political structures of

Scotland and more interested in how Scotland's position in the UK shaped the identities of the Scottish people.

Scots hate to be called English. They are decisively not English, and they never have been. They are, however, British. Technically. That is, Scotland is part of Great Britain, which is part of the UK. They are ruled by the British government, and still sing "God Save the Queen." But Scotland is its own nation, culturally speaking (and, to a limited extent, politically speaking).

Those outside of the UK seem to equate Britishness with Englishness. Whenever an American talks about a British accent, they are really referring to an English accent. What they fail to realize is that Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are all part of the UK as well. People from these nations all British, but they are not English. And their accents sound very different from an English one. Being British, therefore, is a much more complicated issue than most outsiders realize.

It was this issue that I was most interested in. I wondered what individual Scots thought about being part of the UK, but I didn't know how to ask. Luckily, I didn't have to. Many Scottish students I met brought up the topic without any prompting.

When I was hanging out with some friends once, one girl brought up the fact that Andy Murray, a famous Scottish tennis player, is often said to be "British when he wins and Scottish when he loses." That is, when he wins, the British claim him as their own, and when he loses, they call him Scottish. "Why can't he be Scottish all the time?" she asked.

A recent study proved that the English perceive Andy Murray as more British when he wins and Scottish when he loses because of a psychological phenomenon called MOATING

(Bernache-Assollant). This phenomenon describes what happens when people want to associate themselves with a winner and distance themselves from a loser in order to be viewed favorably themselves. It is the same phenomenon as t-shirt fans, who only root for a team as long as its winning. With Andy Murray, this phenomenon takes on a political cast.

Andy Murray seems to be a prime example of the conflicting identities Scots have to navigate in their daily lives. His identity is chosen for him based on how his matches turn out. However, like most Scots, Murray claims a Scottish identity first and foremost. Before the 2014 referendum, Murray said that if Scotland became independent, he would choose to play for his native Scotland rather than Great Britain (Tran). Until that happens, however, he has to figure out what it means to be both British and Scottish.

He is not alone in that. Most Scots deal with this inner conflict of how to be Scottish and British at the same time. They refer to themselves as Scottish first and foremost, but so long as Scotland remains part of the UK, they are also British. If Scotland was independent, they wouldn't have to deal with this identity conflict anymore.

Many students I interacted with seemed to support the idea of Scottish independence, and some openly supported the SNP. During the 2014 referendum, the voting age was lowered to include sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds (Breeze). Many of the students I interacted with would have been fifteen or younger at the time of the vote, making them unable to participate. If there was another referendum, they would be able to vote, and it is likely they would vote Yes on Scottish independence. This nationalistic sentiment among young adults, coupled with Brexit, makes it likely that there will be another independence referendum in Scotland soon, one that might have a different result than the last.

Chapter 11- Scotland's Hidden Powers

One weekend, I decided to climb Calton Hill, one of the seven hills Edinburgh was built on. It is not as tall as the Pentland Hills or as magnificent as Arthur's Seat or Castle Rock. Instead, Calton Hill is known for all the monuments scattered on its summit, dedicated to various famous Scots and important events in Scottish history.

The monuments on the hill turned out to be underwhelming, and the spot was more touristy than I'd anticipated. By this point, a few weeks into my stay in Edinburgh, I was beginning to think of myself like a local, so tourists sometimes got on my nerves. It bugged me that they took pictures of pretty things while ignoring their cultural and historical significance. They were ignoring the parts that I found the most interesting.

Most of the tourists were vying for pictures in front of a replica of the Parthenon. The monument was a nod to the fact that Edinburgh is sometimes known as the Athens of the North because it was the birthplace of the Enlightenment ("Athens of the North"). Like the real Parthenon in Athens, half the structure was missing. With the original Parthenon in Athens, this is because it is in the process of falling down. In Edinburgh, the city ran out of money for the project when the monument was in the process of going up. I suppose that was lucky, because it is a more accurate reflection of the original that way.

That section of the hill was crawling with people, so I decided to take a path leading away from the fray and explore the views from the other side of the hill. That side of the hill, overlooking the Palace of Holyroodhouse and Holyrood Park beyond, was deserted. The path narrowed and there were fewer people and no monuments around which they could gather. Save one.

This lone beehive-shaped stone structure was a foot or two taller than me, like a tall well with a metal basket on top. It was set back from the path in an area where the grounds were not as well-manicured as the more traversed parts of the hill. It seemed lonely and forgotten, as if I were the first person to visit it in years. A plaque on the side of the cylinder explained that this monument was meant to commemorate a vigil that lasted from 1992 to 1997 when Scotland voted to restore its Parliament (“Vigil”). Before that time, the Scottish Parliament hadn’t met since Scotland became part of Great Britain in 1707. The people who held vigil there for five years in the 1990s wanted to bring it back, to give Scotland a modicum of independence and self-determination in its government. Their efforts were successful, as the Scottish Parliament was reinstated in 1998. The monument, or cairn as it is called, watches over the modern Parliament building across the street from Holyroodhouse, guarding the structure it helped create. The metal basket on top of the cairn is meant to be a brazier, a nod to the fires that were kept burning during the 1,980-day vigil (“Vigil”). The monument is a symbol of Scotland’s desire to become an independent nation.

On the base of the cairn was another plaque inscribed with the closing lines from a Hugh MacDiarmid poem called “Gairmscoile” (MacDiarmid). It was in Scots, a dialect which is somewhere between English and Scottish Gaelic. It read:

“For we ha’e faith in Scotland’s hidden poo’ers,

The present’s theirs, but a’ the past and the future’s oors.”

In English, this would say, “for we have faith in Scotland’s hidden powers/ the present’s theirs, but the past and the future’s ours.”

The poem and the monument seemed to be a symbol of rebellion. The poem could almost be taken as a threat, or a warning. You may rule over us now, it seemed to say, but someday we will rise again. You can't change who we are, no matter how hard you try.

Reviving the Scottish Parliament was a step towards independence. That is, it gave Scotland more say over its own political affairs. The Scottish Parliament now has powers over things like education, economic development, and healthcare ("Scotland Act (1998)"). Yet its powers are still limited. The British Parliament at Westminster retains many powers to make decisions for Scotland in things like foreign affairs, major economic policy, and national security ("Scotland Act (1998)"). Scotland is still far from being an independent nation. But that doesn't stop the Scots from dreaming.

I suppose there is something in the fact that the monument was set apart from the others on the hill, far from the ones that garnered most tourists' attention. It was a forgotten Ebenezer. Its location on the hill was symbolic, as it overlooked the Parliament, but the price of the symbolism was that no one seemed to pay it much attention. None of the tourists seemed to know or care that the monument was there. They didn't seem at all interested in Scotland's struggle for independence. Researching the monument afterwards for this thesis proved a difficult feat as well. I had trouble finding much information about it in any of the articles I found about Calton Hill. If I hadn't seen it for myself, I likely wouldn't have ever known it existed.

This parallels the amount of attention Scottish independence seems to get in the rest of the world. Scotland's struggle, at least in the past few decades, has been largely peaceful. There have been no bloody revolutions in Scotland to gain media attention from the rest of the world. Independence is an important issue in Scotland, but it is one that most outside the UK seem

unaware of. I knew little about Scotland's independence referendum until I was preparing to go there myself. I was enlightened by a few paragraphs in a tourist guide, one that seemed to suggest that since the independence referendum was behind us, independence was no longer an issue. I hadn't been in Scotland long before I realized this was not the case. Scotland's struggle isn't violent or dramatic, but it is no less real as a result. If you listen long and hard enough, you will hear the desire for independence ringing loud and clear.

Chapter 12- Culloden

During the first break of the semester, I decided to go on a trip. The first five weeks of classes were a whirlwind, so by the time the break rolled around I hadn't had a chance to plan anything. I had talked with several friends about visiting various places around Scotland during that week, but no plans ever solidified. I decided that I may as well go on a trip on my own.

Inverness, the capital of the Highlands, had been high on my list since before I arrived in Scotland. Not because I was interested in the city of Inverness itself, but because it was near two sites that I was excited to visit: Loch Ness and Culloden Battlefield. Visiting both would take two days, which meant that I was going to have to stay overnight in Inverness. Alone.

By that point, I had gone on several day-trips by myself without any problems. But I still had never stayed in a hotel by myself. I still had never eaten in a restaurant alone before either. It occurred to me that this was a good a time as any to do so. I booked a private room in a hostel (it only cost a few pounds more than a shared room, and I figured that I would be overloaded on new experiences by that point in the day), then got on the train.

I brought a book with me to read on the train—Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, a novel about the Jacobite uprisings that took place in the 18th century in the Highlands—but I didn't open it at all on the way up to Inverness. The train cut straight north through the Highlands, farther north than I had been in Scotland so far, farther north than I had been anywhere in the world. My eyes were glued to the windows, watching the surprisingly green meadows roll by, followed by aspen-cloaked hills and snowy mounds that looked like giant bowls of cookies-and-cream ice cream.

The train pulled into the station in Inverness around noon. I got a chai tea and a scone at a coffeeshop, then wandered around the city. Calling Inverness a city is a bit generous. Scotland reminds me of Texas in that it has a handful of big cities, and after that the sizes drop off dramatically. Scotland's two biggest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, are comparable in size to Austin. Inverness, the third largest city, is smaller, with more of the atmosphere of a large town than a city. After walking along the waterfront under an overcast sky for several minutes, I decided to find a bus to Culloden Battlefield.

In my mind, no place represents the desire for Scottish independence more than Culloden. The battle that occurred there was not for Scottish independence, per se, but at the same time, it was a place where many Highlanders took a stand for their beliefs and way of life in opposition to the English one.

In 1688, the British Parliament deposed the Stuart king James II and VII and replaced him with his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange in what was known as the Glorious Revolution (Eversole). Parliament had many reasons for this, stemming from the fact that James II and VII was Catholic. Parliament feared that he would create a Catholic dynasty, and return Protestant England to Catholicism. Throughout his reign, James did try to strengthen Catholicism in Great Britain and to institute more Catholic officers in the largely Protestant British army (Eversole). As a result, Parliament viewed James II and VII as a threat. They went down the list of successors and chose the first Protestants they could find, William and Mary, to replace King James. King James fled to France when William and Mary approached from the Netherlands with their armies, which Parliament took as James' abdication (Eversole). Thus, the revolution was glorious because it involved no bloodshed.

Many, most notably the Scottish Highlanders, viewed the move as less than glorious. The Gaelic Highlanders held onto the traditional belief of the divine right of kings (Stroh 43). It didn't matter if the king was cruel or unjust or foolish; he was the king, chosen by God to rule over the people. The way the Gaels saw it, Parliament was disregarding the will of God by acting as though they could replace the monarch whenever they chose. The Highlanders were also mostly Catholic, so they resented the persecution of the Catholic king.

Although the conflict is often presented as being a fight between the Highlanders and the English, things were not this simple. Many Lowland Scots, English, and Irish also supported the deposed king. At the same time, many Highlanders sided with the new regime, usually because they thought the move would help them gain political influence themselves.

The supporters of King James were known as the Jacobites, from the Latin form of the name James (Lenman). Their enemies were the Williamites, the supporters of William and Mary. These groups clashed many times in the years after the Glorious Revolution. The first Jacobite uprising was in 1689, right after the Glorious Revolution. Another was in 1715 after the death of Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch (Lenman). The Rising of 1745—or the Forty-Five, as it is often called—was the last and most famous of these risings. It was led by Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the grandson of James II and VII, and it culminated in the Battle of Culloden.

Prince Charles Edwards Stuart—known at the Young Pretender by his enemies and Bonnie Prince Charlie by his supporters—led the rising on behalf of his father, James III and VIII, the Old Pretender. By now, King George II of Hanover was on the throne, the throne that many still believed belonged to the Stuart family. His supporters were known as the Hanoverians, who had the same political ideas as the Williamites before them.

Bonnie Prince Charlie, a twenty-five-year-old son of a throneless king, was confident that the Jacobites would defeat the Hanoverians (Mallinson). At the time, the English were caught up in the War of Austrian Succession on the European continent. Prince Charles and his father believed that this would be a perfect time to stage another rebellion, when the English would be distracted with fighting elsewhere (“The Jacobite Rebellion”). By this time, the deposed Stuarts had been hiding in France for decades, and had formed an alliance with the French King Louis XIV. Few hated the English as much as the Scots did, but the French came close. King Louis XIV promised to send aid to the Jacobite rebels, hoping that the Jacobite uprising would also distract the English from the War, and lead to their defeat (“Forty-Five”). Prince Charles arrived in the Highlands carrying this promise of French aid, which he used to convince many clan chiefs to join his cause. Many were hesitant, given the failure of the previous risings, but he managed to round up enough support to form an army. They started their campaign at Glenfinnan, taking the Hanoverians by surprise (“Forty-Five”).

At first, the Hanoverians did not consider the Jacobites a threat. However, as the Jacobites defeated the Hanoverian forces again and again, the Hanoverians realized their mistake. The English Parliament called back some of their forces from the Continent to help defeat the Jacobites. The Jacobites invaded England, making it about a hundred miles from London (“Union and Jacobitism”). However, they did not receive as much popular support in England as they had anticipated, so they were forced to retreat rather than try to take the throne. By that point, the Hanoverians had amassed a large force that chased the Jacobites all the way to the Highlands, to Culloden.

The Battle of Culloden was the final battle of the Forty-Five. I heard it described as the Scottish Alamo once, a description I found apt. Like the Alamo, it was more a massacre than a battle.

By the time they reached Culloden, the Jacobites were dangerously low on supplies. The French aid that King Louis XIV promised had never arrived, because the English had sunk the French ship carrying money and supplies to the Highlands. Many Highland clansmen had abandoned the Jacobite cause, returning home to eat and to rest. As a result, the Jacobites were vastly outnumbered. The Jacobite force had 2,000 men at Culloden, compared to the 18,000 British under the Duke of Cumberland who chased them (“Forty-Five”).

The loss was also partially Prince Charles’ fault. He was eager to meet with the Hanoverians in battle, and in his haste, he picked a strategically poor location for the clash (Mallinson). The Highlanders fought at their best when they could charge downhill at their enemies, using the momentum and the sheer fear factor of the charge to defeat their enemies (Doran). Culloden field was flat and boggy, with tall grass that concealed the rocks and holes in the ground, making a charge across it treacherous. The Jacobites were disadvantaged from the start.

The fighting lasted less than an hour. In that time, the Hanoverians killed at least 1,000 Jacobites, compared to the 300 men that the Hanoverians lost (“Forty-Five”). The Jacobites who survived fled. In the UK, rebelling against the monarch was considered treason, and the penalty was death. Duke Cumberland, the leader of the Hanoverian forces, later tracked down, captured, and killed many of the Jacobites who fled, earning him the nickname Butcher Cumberland (“Forty-Five”). Although many Jacobites managed to survive, some were not that lucky.

Like many of his supporters, Prince Charles had to go into hiding, navigating from safe house to safe house through the Highlands. Despite the high price on his head, no one turned him in. He was able to flee to the Isle of Skye, and then back to France, where he died many years later, throneless, heirless, and drunk (“Forty-Five”). The Jacobite cause died with him.

What fascinated me most about Culloden was the aftermath. The fact that the Jacobites managed to get so close to London, where they could overthrow King George II and institute King James III in his place, terrified the Hanoverian forces. They realized that the Scottish Highlanders were still a threat despite the Act of Union. Thus, they set out on a campaign to suppress Gaelic culture. The forces of capitalism had already disrupted the feudalistic makeup of the clan system, turning the Highland chiefs from paternalistic protectors of their clansmen to landlords who cared more about profit than people. The defeat at Culloden was the death blow to this system. Parliament outlawed many aspects of Gaelic culture. They forbid clansmen from wearing kilts, a move that was later reversed (“Union and Jacobitism”). They set up a system of English-language education in the Highlands, discouraging the use of the Gaelic language. Parliament also stripped clan chiefs of their power over their own people. This meant that the chiefs were no longer sovereign over their clans; instead, they had to answer to the British monarch and to Parliament.

These acts had a tremendous effect on the history of the Highlands from that point onwards. Clan lands, which were once tended communally, were divided into small tracts called crofts, which were barely able to support the families who lived on them. Rather than caring for the well-being of their people, the chiefs cared only about profit, hoping to gain power and influence in British society. As a result, many of them decided to turn their lands into large scale sheep farms. They forced some crofters onto smaller and smaller tracts, and chased others off the

land, forcing them to leave the Highlands where their families had lived for generations. These displaced crofters had to emigrate either to the Lowlands or to another country altogether, leading to a Scottish diaspora.

This decline of Scottish Highland culture prompted many writers to take action to try to preserve the culture before it disappeared completely. James Macpherson, the writer who forged the Ossian poems, was one. Sir Walter Scott was another. His novel *Waverley*, the book I brought with me to the Highlands, is about a British redcoat who eventually became mixed up in Jacobite affairs before the Forty-Five. All Scott's novels seem to glorify the Highlands, creating an idealized view of life as it was there. Largely due to his influence, the culture of the Highlands—including the kilt—were adopted by Scotland as a whole, creating a unique Scottish identity in opposition to the English. Despite the English's attempts to kill Highland culture, Scottish culture emerged even stronger.

Scott was far from the only author to write a novel about the Forty-Five. It seems that the rebellion comes up in every historical fiction about Scotland. Even Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series centers around the Forty-Five, the events leading up to it, and its aftermath. The uprising was a source of literary material for generations of authors since the rebellion occurred.

Many songs were also written surrounding the events of the Forty-Five and Culloden, both in Gaelic and in English. One of the most famous is the "Skye Boat Song," a song that many Scottish folk artists have performed and recorded over the years. It was written in the late 1800s, over a hundred years after the Battle of Culloden, by an Englishman named Sir Harold Boulton (Durie). The melody was used as the theme song for the *Outlander* TV series, although its lyrics were based on ones written by Robert Louis Stevenson (Durie). The original song tells of how Prince Charles escaped Scotland after Culloden by boarding a boat from the mainland to

the Isle of Skye. The song seems to bless the boat, hoping for the prince's safe escape. The fact that the song is still so popular today, though it deals with a historical event that occurred nearly three hundred years ago, belies how strongly the Scots hold on to their history.

Writers from the 18th century onwards were captivated by the Forty-Five, especially by Culloden. I was no different, so naturally I had to go see Culloden Battlefield myself.

Today, a museum sits on the edge of the battlefield. It laid out the history leading up to the final battle at Culloden, from both the Hanoverian and the Jacobite point of view. It explained why the battle was such a massacre and why it was so important to Scottish history. Out on the battlefield, there are several rock monuments tucked into the long golden grass. The worn and lichen-coated rocks look like tombstones, each bearing the name of a clan who lost men at the battle. There are also stones for the Lowlanders and the English Jacobites who fought and died there. In the center of the field is a giant well-shaped monument covered in bushy ivy, commemorating the battle as a whole.

I was looking forward to taking my time wandering the field, soaking up the history and experiencing the place to its fullest, but as I walked, it started to hail. At first, I tried to walk through it, but the ice stung my face as a brutal Scottish wind whipped across the field, so I decided to head back inside the museum. I stayed until it closed, waiting for the bus to take me back to Inverness.

Chapter 13- Exercising My Independence in Inverness

My mother told me that she visited Inverness once when she was a kid, while she and her family lived in Germany. All she remembered from the trip was that it was the coldest she had ever been in her life. The story lingered in the back of my mind, but it wasn't enough to prevent me from visiting Inverness in February. When the museum closed before the bus arrived, meaning that the other visitors and I had to wait outside, her story flooded back into my mind. By the time the bus arrived, I was shivering so badly that I could barely walk in a straight line. It wasn't much warmer on the bus than it was outside. When I got off the bus by where my hostel was supposed to be, I took a wrong turn and had to walk an extra thirty minutes in the cold. By the time I found the hostel, checked in, and found my room, I couldn't feel my fingers or my toes.

I sat down on the floor with my back against the radiator, soaking up as much heat as I could. I regretted not putting on another layer, even though I had been carrying several extra jackets in the backpack I had carried around all day. As cold as I was, I couldn't imagine going back out again that night. But at the same time, I was starving. All I had eaten that day was a scone and a granola bar, which was not nearly enough. I was beginning to understand why so many of the Jacobite Highlanders had gone home before the battle at Culloden.

Dinner, I decided, would have to be at a pub. Although I had eaten in several pubs, I had never eaten in one by myself before. This made me even more hesitant to leave my spot by the radiator.

Rationally speaking, eating by yourself in a restaurant is no big deal. It isn't that much different than eating with someone else. But the thing about anxiety is that it is hardly ever

rational. I worried that everyone in the restaurant would judge me for sitting alone. Or worse, that someone would start bothering me and I wouldn't be able to get them to leave me alone (as a young woman, this was always a possibility).

I debated skipping dinner that night, the way I had so many times freshman year. Eventually, I pulled on several jackets and set out to find a pub. It turns out that hunger and the sense that you have something to prove can be strong motivators.

It wasn't difficult to find a pub in the city. I ordered a steak and ale pie and cleaned my plate. I was the only person eating alone in the pub, which was shockingly empty, but no one seemed to notice me. Afterwards, I walked home in the dark with a full stomach, feeling proud of myself. I had eaten alone in a restaurant in a foreign country. What couldn't I do?

Culloden was an Ebenezer in Scotland's history, but Inverness was becoming an Ebenezer for me as well. It was no longer important just because of the historical significance of the place in relation to Scotland's independence; it was significant because it was a place where I was learning to exercise my own independence. My history in the place was beginning to stack up on top of the history of the Scots who had lived, fought, and died there before me. I was becoming connected to a place, becoming attached to it as I constructed my own history and my own Ebenezers there, in a country that wasn't mine.

Chapter 14- Turning Twenty-One in Scotland

My twenty-first birthday fell on the Wednesday after the break. I had mixed feelings about reaching the milestone when I was over four and a half thousand miles from home and an ocean away from where twenty-one was an important birthday. My friend Angus told me that American pop culture is so influential in the UK that twenty-one is still treated as a milestone, even though there is nothing inherently special about turning twenty-one there. Before I arrived in Scotland, I halfway promised myself that I wouldn't drink until my twenty-first birthday, despite the fact that the drinking age there is eighteen, so my birthday would seem special. I broke that promise my first meal in Scotland, so I had to find some other way to celebrate the day.

I only had one class on Wednesdays, so I decided to skip it that day and go on a trip instead. It was a difficult choice, given that I had a well-ingrained notion of the importance of attendance. Skipping class for the heck of it was unfathomable to me. But at the same time, I knew that I would only turn twenty-one once, and it was very likely that this would be the only birthday I would spend in Scotland. I decided to make the most of it. Since it was a Wednesday, I assumed that most of my friends had class, so I didn't bother inviting them along. Anyway, by that point I had fallen in love with the freedom of traveling alone, to the point that inviting someone to go with me almost seemed to ruin the experience.

Unable to defy the pull of the Highlands, I decided that I would head to Perth, which was known as the gateway to the Highlands. Kinnoull Hill in Perth boasted a view of the geographical split between the Lowlands and the Highlands. This placed hiking Kinnoull Hill firmly on my to-do list. I booked a pair of train tickets—one going and one returning—a few days before my birthday.

On the morning of my birthday, I woke up before dawn to catch my train. My twisted logic of getting up so early was that I wanted to bleed everything out of the day that I could. I had bought the earliest, and cheapest, train tickets that I could find for that day. The morning of, however, I cursed my planning. Not because I had to get up so early, but because of the weather forecast.

It had snowed two days before my birthday, carpeting Edinburgh in white. That, in and of itself, I took as a birthday gift. As a native Texan, I had only seen snow a handful of times in my lifetime. I could vividly remember seeing snow for the first time when I was five years old. The fact that snow, which always looked so fluffy in movies, could be so hard and icy had baffled me. The few times it had snowed in Austin, most of the snow had fallen during the night. We'd go to sleep with a green yard and wake to find it covered in white. I rarely had the opportunity to watch the snow fall, so on that day in Edinburgh I was mesmerized by the way that the snowflakes swirled and danced in the wind, floating to the ground like flower petals. The people I passed on the paths through the Meadows that day seemed confused by the childlike glee in my eyes. I didn't care. I stopped every few steps to take another picture or video to capture the moment forever.

The weather forecast on my birthday called for another round of snow, along with intermittent rain and gusting winds. Snow was fine for a day spent sitting inside in class and or in the library, but not for a day that I wished to spend hiking. I waffled on whether I should cancel my trip, because I had learned in my two months in Scotland that weather reports were often wrong. I told Angus once that the Texas joke "if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes," almost seemed more fitting for Scotland than it did for Texas.

One day, I sat in a classroom waiting for class to start. Outside, the sky was a foreboding grey, and the wind whipped the flurries of falling snowflakes into swirls that sometime traveled horizontally or back towards the sky rather than towards the ground as they were supposed to. Arthur's Seat was barely visible over the city. I took a video of the swirling snow through the classroom window. A few minutes later, I looked back outside, and it looked like a completely different day. The grey clouds had been replaced with a stunningly blue sky without even a hint of snow. I could see past Arthur's Seat, almost all the way to the Firth of Forth beyond it. I took a picture of the view, with a time stamp that was five minutes later than the video I had just taken.

At about that moment, one of my classmates came into the room. When she looked out the window she froze, a shocked look on her face. "It's raining on the other side of the building," she said, her dripping clothes confirming her story.

In Scotland, I learned to be prepared for every type of weather every day. If the sky was blue in the morning, I learned not to be surprised if it hailed later. Layering, I learned, was key.

In the end, I decided that I might as well go to Perth. I had already bought the ticket, after all. But all the time I spent waffling meant that I missed my train. I arrived at the train station just as the train pulled out. British trains wait for no one. Once again, I debated canceling the trip, but I had already made the cold and windy walk to the station, so I figured I may as well buy another ticket and go.

Missing the first train turned out to be a happy accident. The train I was originally supposed to take took a circuitous route to Perth— west to Stirling, where I would have had to have changed trains, then back north and east to Perth. The train I ended up taking was on a

direct route to Perth along the coast. By the time the train pulled away from the station, dawn was breaking, and I got to watch the sun rise over the North Sea. It was difficult to tell from the train, but the water near the shore seemed frozen, shiny and unmoving under the early morning light. That the sea could freeze seemed illogical to me, especially since we weren't all that far north. Whether the sea was frozen or it was an illusion, I still don't know. Either way, the view was beautiful.



Whenever my family travelled growing up, we would map out our itinerary in detail, deciding in advance how we would spend our time. Partially because we were all the planning type, and partially because deciding where to go always involved compromise, and it saved time to get the arguments out of the way before we arrived. Back home, I was still a rigid planner. In Scotland, this tendency went out the window as quickly as my promise not to drink until my birthday, with as little forethought. I had discovered that one of the things I liked most about traveling alone was the opportunity for spontaneity. I liked to have a few ideas of places to visit, but I never had any firm plans about how to spend my time. I liked the idea that I could wander wherever I wanted, exploring the city as I found it, rather than mapping it out in a guidebook first. I suppose that was partially a product of knowing (thinking) that I had five months to spend in the country, giving me plenty of time to explore. I was in no hurry.

When I arrived in Perth, I wandered from the train station to the city center. It reminded me of a small East Texas town, with tired buildings in need of a fresh coat of paint. Still, it had that paradoxical quaintness that neglected towns often have, feeling simultaneously dirty and well-loved, like a ragged teddy bear. I walked along the edge of town next to a vibrant green city park and crossed the River Tay on a railroad bridge that looked like it came straight out of a

punk coming-of-age movie. On the other side of the river, I found myself in a community botanical garden, with a map that had everything but the hill I wanted on it. I opened Google Maps, expecting it to lead me to Kinnoull Hill.

It did not.

Google directed me along a four-lane road on a hillside, under a highway overpass (a rare sight in Scotland), until the sidewalk dissolved into a dirt path. It was only when I realized that I was headed downhill that I decided it was taking me in the wrong direction. At that point, I could see the hill—its sheer cliffside lorded over the highway I had just crossed under. There was no way to get to it from where I was, unless I wanted to cross four lanes of racing traffic and scale a vertical cliff face. I backtracked, going almost all the way back to the garden from which I started. At that point, I decided to trust my instincts. I dove into a neighborhood off a side street, one on an incline. I weaved my way between the picturesque cottages along the road until I stumbled upon a trailhead with a sign that said “Kinnoull Hill.”

Following the trail away from the neighborhood and into the forest was like stepping through the wardrobe into Narnia. At first, I was walking along a path lined with trees on one side and small farms on the other, then I abruptly found myself surrounded on all sides by forest. The manmade world seemed to melt away as the path disappeared under a dense quilt of fallen leaves, leaving me to my own devices once again.

Whenever an icebreaker question is needed, the dichotomy of ocean person versus mountain person comes up. It seems to suggest that people are either drawn to the watery depths or to the rocky heights and nothing in between. I usually say that I am an ocean person—I could watch the waves for days on end, mesmerized by the way the light catches on the water. But I

haven't spent enough time in the mountains to make that decision definitively. My father has often said he and my mother failed my sister and me by never taking us to see snow-capped mountains while we were growing up. Judging by my love for hiking and hilltop views, I think I could love the mountains as much as I love the ocean.

I have long thought that forest person should be an option along with oceans and mountains. The vertical expanse of the trees and the horizontal breadth of the forest make you feel as if you were in a giant church designed by nature. The tree branches form a roof as they stretch towards the heavens and the light filters through the leafy tops as if through stained glass. The air in the forest, thick with oxygen produced by the trees, seems almost holy.

I have often felt more drawn to the trees than to the ocean or to the hills. I'm not sure why. Part of it could be because of all the stories that take place in the forest, from fairy tales to Robin Hood. It could be the fact that these stories were printed on paper that was once part of such a forest. Endless hours of my childhood were spent with my nose in a book, consuming the words like oxygen. It could be that one of my father's hobbies is woodworking. I spent many hours of my childhood with him, surrounded by fluffy piles of sawdust on the garage floor, tracing the grains that undulated like frozen waves on freshly sanded boards, enveloped by the smell of oak and pine and cedar. Trees shaped my imagination as a kid. The hours I didn't spend reading or helping my father in the garage, I spent outside in our backyard, climbing the row of tree-like bushes that lined our back fence. I couldn't escape the trees, and I didn't want to.

Even now, forests seem magical to me. As I tromped through the fallen leaves, winding my way through oaks and redwoods and aspens, I imagined knights and warriors and fairies weaving through the trees. In a land with so many castles and so many legends, the stories I

wrote in my head didn't seem so far-fetched. It wasn't hard to see why so many authors and poets had romanticized Scotland for centuries; the scenery made it almost impossible not to.

As I walked through the trees, I thought about how incredible it was that I was there at all. Even though going to class and walking the streets of Edinburgh was becoming routine, the wonder of it was never lost on me. That day, it struck me how odd it was that I was walking so casually through an unknown forest alone in a foreign country. Back home, I had never been hiking on my own. But many things I once felt were impossible for me to do were beginning to feel natural in Scotland.

Independence was the ability to walk alone in the forest on a Wednesday. Out there in the forest, miles from the city where I was staying and even farther from home, there was no one to tell me where I should go, and no one to remind me that I should be in class that day. I felt like I had nothing to fear, because there was nothing I couldn't do.



There are two sides to being alone. One is independence—the freedom that comes with not having anyone to tell you what to do. The other is loneliness. I felt the first on my birthday. I felt the second the day after.

My birthday itself had been largely solitary until the evening, when I had dinner with my Young Life team, a group I had gotten involved with in Scotland. One of the boys on the team had the same birthday as me—a fact I found thrilling, as I had always wanted a birthday buddy—so the team celebrated both of us with a cookie cake. As we ate and laughed in a friend's flat, I felt at home and fortunate that I had found friends to celebrate with so early in the semester.

The next day, however, the loneliness set in. It was the saddest I had felt to that point in Scotland, and the saddest I would feel until I had to leave. It wasn't really homesickness; I didn't wish I was home, but I did wish that the family and friends I had left behind could be in Scotland with me. I had made a large number of friends in Scotland already, despite how little time I had been there. Still, I missed being around people who had known me long enough that I didn't feel like I had to explain myself to them anymore.

As I stood outside my classroom that day, waiting for class to start, I started sifting through all the texts and Facebook messages people had sent me the day before, when I was too busy hiking to respond. It occurred to me that I had never received so many birthday wishes before. Usually, people would tell me happy birthday in person when they next saw me. Sometimes, they forgot to do even that. This year, because I was away, they had to make the effort to reach out and tell me. I was surprised by how many did.

One message I received was from my Young Life team back home, a group of friends that had been like a family to me in college, and that I missed more than anyone. It was a video of the team singing me happy birthday. They would never win any awards for their singing ability or their coordination, but the love in the gesture could not have been more evident. I had been worried that they didn't miss me as much as I missed them, and that they would forget me as soon as there was an ocean between us. But they hadn't. The video brought tears to my eyes, reminding me that although I was on a journey by myself, far from the people I loved, I wasn't alone. I watched it over and over again that day, and every time after that when I felt homesick.

Section III: Scottish Gaelic

Chapter 15- A Gaelic Lesson

“Gaelic is a beautiful language,” my Gaelic professor would say with an ironic smile each time she tried to teach us how to pronounce a certain sound that Gaelic had and English did not. Most of these sounds sounded a little like a garbage disposal that had a spoon lodged in it, sounds that are not natural for an English-speaker to make.

Out of the three classes I took in Scotland, two involved Scottish Gaelic. One was called Celtic Literature in Translation, in which we read poems that had been composed in either Irish or Scottish Gaelic and translated into English for us. The class was part literature and part history, because so many of the poems required an extensive amount of historical background in order for us to understand them. The poems were a cultural and historical goldmine, as many of them commented on historical events that the poets were living through. Others praised clan chiefs, emphasizing their ancestry and their values, giving much insight into Highland society. Together, they formed a snapshot of the Highland’s past. Many of the poems that we read—epics and ballads, odes and love poems—were written by bards, real-life versions of Ossian. The Ossian poems were on the reading list, although our professor treated them with skepticism and scorn. In the end, we didn’t have the chance to discuss them.

The other class was Introduction to Gaelic Language and Culture. In it, we learned about the history and the culture of the Scottish Highlands, focusing mostly on the Gaelic language and its present predicament. Part of this course involved learning the language itself.

Before classes started, I had been so excited about my schedule. I could hardly believe that I was getting to learn about the two things I had been interested in since my first semester of college: Highland poetry and Scottish Gaelic. I was especially thrilled about learning Gaelic

itself. But although the classes were as interesting as I had hoped, learning Gaelic was much more frustrating than I had anticipated.

Once when I was young, my father and I found some songs in Scottish Gaelic on iTunes, and started listening to snippets of them for fun. That was my first exposure to Scottish Gaelic. I remember being overwhelmed by how beautiful the language was and how otherworldly it sounded. I suppose that is what spurred my quest to learn Scottish Gaelic, more than even Ossian. I was captivated by it, and swore to myself that someday I was going to learn that beautiful language. As I was learning to speak it, however, I began to wonder whether I was misremembering the language, or if I had gotten it confused with some other language. Surely this language with all these grating sounds couldn't be the same one that I had heard years ago?

Gaelic was not only harsh-sounding, it was also confusing. It baffles me that as much as I love reading and writing, languages do not come easily to me. I took Spanish all the way from kindergarten to high school and did well enough in the classes, but the one Spanish class I took in college was the lowest grade I've gotten since arriving at UT. Even after all that time learning Spanish, I could only limp my way through a conversation now. I have often suspected this is a motivation issue. From kindergarten through middle school, Spanish was a required class, and in high school I didn't have many other options. In college, I stuck with it only because I had some class credit from high school that I didn't want to waste. But I did not enjoy learning the language. I knew learning Spanish was practical, but I didn't love it. I often wondered if I would be better at learning a language that I was interested in.

Having learned Spanish for so long, the basic grammar and pronunciation were familiar to me. I had forgotten what it felt like to learn a language system from scratch. Although I didn't realize it at the time, Spanish is not that difficult to learn, as languages go. My Spanish teacher in

high school told our class that Spanish is easy because the words are spelled exactly the way they sound, so once you know the pronunciation of the basic sounds, you can read any new word aloud. And none of the sounds are all that different from the ones in English.

That is not the case in Scottish Gaelic. In fact, the opposite is true: it's easier to learn Scottish Gaelic if you accept from the beginning that any word you encounter is not going to be pronounced the way you think it should be. For example, the Scottish Gaelic word for coffee is spelled "cofaidh." It is pronounced exactly the same as in English. Obviously.

Letters are not pronounced the same way that they are in English, and, to make things more interesting, Scottish Gaelic involves several sounds that don't exist in English. Consider the word "loch," for instance, the Scottish Gaelic word for lake. It is a word that most people have heard before because of the Loch Ness monster. When pronounced correctly, the "-ch" sound at the end is a German-sounding hiss (a Gaelic speaker told me that people who speak German pick up Gaelic easily, because the sound systems are so similar. English speakers, not so much). Some of the sounds cannot even be described in a way that an English speaker would understand, because those sounds don't exist in English. My notes for the class are filled with phrases like "pronounce this letter somewhere between r and z," or "pronounced like a phlegmy g." The only way to make sense of it is to hear it.

It is also helpful if you forget everything you know about English grammar. As English speakers, we take it for granted that sentences, by and large, are structured with a sentence-verb-object word order. In Gaelic, the word order is flipped: verb-subject-object. If you want to translate a sentence from English to Gaelic, you not only have to translate each individual word, but also change the order of the entire sentence.

Many grammatical constructions in Gaelic do not make sense to an English-speaking mind. For example, they don't have the verb "to have." Instead, they have the construction "at + pronoun" in its place. To say you have a cat, for example, it would translate, roughly, to "There is a cat at me." They also do not have the verb "to wear;" instead, you have to say "on + pronoun," as in "There are blue pants on me." These two phrases combine in the phrase "I love you." You cannot directly translate "I love you" into Gaelic. Instead, you have to say "Tha gaol agam ort." This roughly translates to "there is love at me on you." Romantic, isn't it?

The class was designed for study-abroad students like me who had no background in Gaelic and who would probably never take another Gaelic language class. This meant that we spent little time on grammar and individual words and instead focused on memorizing phrases. I could say to you, for instance, that I am from the United States, but I could not tell you which word in that phrase correlated with "from." I understood why the class was structured that way—after all, there was no way we would become fluent in the language after a semester. But I wanted to learn more. In the end, I learned little of the language, and much of it I will likely forget in no time at all, since I will never use it again.

There are a few words that I won't forget. If you learn nothing else about Gaelic, you should at least learn the word for whisky. It is "uisge beatha" (pronounced, roughly, "oosh-kay be-hud," with the emphasis on the first syllable of each word). In English, this translates to "water of life." Amazing how much those two little words can tell you about the Scottish outlook.

At first, I was disappointed that the language wasn't as beautiful as I remembered, and that the grammar and sound systems were so difficult to grasp. Every class was a dizzying cacophony of unnatural sounds and grammar rules that didn't make any sense. But when I

listened to the professor chat with the TA in Gaelic, I yearned to know what they were saying. Not because I wanted to eavesdrop, but because I was fascinated by how easily the language rolled off their tongues, with no hesitation whatsoever. The language didn't sound so harsh when they spoke it, as if the edges had been worn down with use. Gaelic felt like a code I couldn't crack, and I can't stand letting intellectual challenges go without a fight.

Chapter 16- Gaelic's Historical Decline and Status Today

Whenever I met someone new and they heard my telltale American accent, they would ask me what I was doing in Scotland and what I was studying. When I mentioned I was learning Scottish Gaelic, I was always met with surprise and a dose of skepticism. They never asked “why bother?” but they may as well have.

Nearly all of them seemed to think Scottish Gaelic was useless, especially to a Texan. They had never needed to know the language and they lived in Scotland. Why would I need to learn it? Why would I want to?

Their response shocked me. All scholarly articles about the decline of Gaelic cried for action. Having read so much about the culture of the Highlands, especially Gaelic poetry, I saw the value of the language. I saw a clear argument as to why the language ought to be saved. The articles all said that most Scots didn't see the point of saving Gaelic, but it still surprised me to witness this skepticism firsthand. I shocked me that I, as an outsider, could see so clearly why efforts to save the language should be made, while they did not.

Their skepticism is a result of the process that tried to kill off Scottish Gaelic centuries ago. The decline of Scottish Gaelic was no accident; instead, it was a honed approach to suppress and control the Scottish Highlanders.

After the Forty-Five, the English realized that their northerly neighbors posed a threat to them, even after they were united into one kingdom. They had always seen the Scottish Highlanders, the Gaels, as a barbarous and warlike people, uncultured and uneducated. After the Highlanders almost overthrew the British government, the English believed that the Gaelic Highlanders threatened their civilization. Their solution to this problem was to quash Gaelic

culture, stripping the Gaels of everything that made them unique in order to neutralize the threat and assimilate them into British society.

This plan to suppress the Gaels involved many laws that unraveled the inner workings of Gaelic society. Parliament outlawed the wearing of the kilt, the traditional dress of the Scottish Highlanders. They also disarmed the Highlanders, taking away their weapons so they could not stage another uprising (“Union and Jacobitism”). These moves were later reversed. The kilt became legal again after Sir Walter Scott wrote popular novels that romanticized Highland history. And despite the attempts to disarm them, many Highlanders joined the British army and became crucial to its success in many wars. The one aspect of the English attempt to kill off Scottish Gaelic culture that remained, and the one which turned out to be most effective, was the war against the Scottish Gaelic language.

It is a common misconception that the Scottish Gaelic language was outlawed after Culloden. No such law was ever passed. However, that does not mean that the English let the language thrive.

After Culloden, the English created a widespread system of education across Scotland, including in the Highlands. This education was done in English in order to crowd out the Gaelic language, hunting it to extinction. Children were punished for speaking Scottish Gaelic at school. Eventually, parents stopped teaching their children to speak Gaelic because they knew their children would not be able to use it. They saw Scottish Gaelic as a hinderance to their children’s success in an English-speaking society, so they encouraged their children to learn English rather than Gaelic. Soon, everyone in the Highlands was bilingual out of necessity (Sharma 169). As parents stopped teaching the language to their children, those who knew Gaelic began to die off without passing the language on to younger generations. This led to a sharp decline in the

number of people who could speak Gaelic. In 1891, there were over 250,000 Gaelic speakers in Scotland (Dunbar 2). In 2011, the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland had declined to less than 60,000 people, which is about 1% of the Scottish population (Sharma 169). This is roughly half the capacity of Darrel K Royal stadium in Austin.

The Scottish Gaels are far from the only victims of language suppression worldwide. This sort of suppression is called cultural genocide, where a dominant group tries to eliminate a minority group by destroying the structures and practices that hold the group together (Morcom 6:34). Cultural genocide is a common practice of conquerors, and the suppression of a language is a component of it. Valuing one language above others ostracizes those whose first language is not the dominant one. It limits the influence of people who speak other languages, excluding them from important decision-making processes, especially in the legal arena. It prevents these people from advocating for themselves and their own interests.

It is not difficult to draw parallels between the Scottish Highlanders and Native Americans. The white settlers forced Native Americans to assimilate to American culture, often through language suppression. The US government mimicked the English in Scotland by setting up boarding schools on reservations where education was done only in English, and where students were punished for speaking their native language (Nagle). As a result, many who grew up speaking the native language lost that language, and the language declined. Today, nearly all Native American languages once spoken in the US are approaching extinction, and there is very little federal funding to reverse this decline (Nagle).

In my experience, the English-language education system on reservations was always presented as a beneficial thing for the Native Americans. The English-speakers were painted as the heroes for wanting to share their knowledge of the world with the Native Americans, and by

teaching them our language so that they could succeed, at least hypothetically, in mainstream society. When you look at the history more closely, however, this story of the benign conqueror doesn't hold up for long. With both Scottish Gaelic and Native American culture, language suppression was a crucial tool in the process of their decline. English was the language of the conqueror, the language of the powerful. In order for the oppressed to even dream of surviving in the conqueror's world, they had to learn the language of their oppressors. This came at the expense of their native languages. With the suppression of a language came the oppression of a people and the death of a culture.

This death of culture was no accident; it was the goal that the conquerors were working towards. In 1892, US army general Richard Henry Pratt said that the purpose of this cultural suppression was to "kill the Indian, but save the man" (Udell 00:17). The hope was that rather than physically kill the Native Americans, the US government could do away with the native cultures and force them to assimilate to the mainstream. This is the same as what the English wanted to do in the Scottish Highlands. They wanted to kill off the Gaels without causing any deaths. Looking at the state of the Gaelic language and culture today, it is clear that their methods were successful. The Gaels are no longer much of a group, but instead are a people scattered across Scotland and the world. Some have lost their culture of origin, while others are clinging to it with both hands, as the world around them tries to rip it away.



Today in Scotland, there are efforts to try to reverse the decline of Scottish Gaelic and to preserve the culture. However, these efforts have faced much resistance. Scots are divided on whether or not the language should be saved, often because many are skeptical about Gaelic's relevance to their personal cultural heritage and to the culture of Scotland as a whole. I

encountered many Scots on both sides of the issue, and each insisted that they were in the right. Some I spoke to insisted that Gaelic was important and that it must be preserved. Others didn't see the point.

The Gaelic issue overlaps with the Scottish nationalism movement in interesting ways. The language has often been tied to the movement, and is sometimes used as a symbol for it. This is in spite of the fact that not all of those who want Scotland to become independent identify with this Scottish Gaelic heritage. For some, the preservation of Gaelic was irrelevant to the Scottish independence movement. They wanted Scotland to become independent, but scorned any attempts to save the Gaelic language. Others insisted that Gaelic was an important part of Scotland's cultural heritage, a heritage that the independence movement aims to protect.

We talked extensively about this dichotomy in my Gaelic class. I asked one of the teaching assistants, one who identified as Gaelic and supported both the preservation of Gaelic and the Scottish independence movement, about how the Gaels felt about the language being appropriated to non-Gaelic Scots in the movement. She dismissed my question, as if it was nonsensical. She insisted that Scottish Gaelic was a part of Scotland's collective history, whether individuals claimed it or not, so they were not appropriating anything. Having heard so many Scots reject Gaelic just as adamantly, I was surprised by this response. I suppose she did answer my question in a way, but I was still disappointed that she seemed unwilling to have a dialogue about the issue. Whether or not Scottish Gaelic was essential to Scottish culture as a whole seemed to be a much more divisive issue than I expected.

Despite this controversy, the Scottish Parliament has made many efforts to save Gaelic. The most important piece of legislation to date is the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005, which promotes Gaelic education and public awareness of its cultural importance, as well as to

increase its use in public spaces, in order to raise Gaelic to the status of an official language of Scotland (Dunbar 17). This Act and others have made some important headway in increasing Gaelic education and use throughout Scotland. More Gaelic-medium schools have been created throughout Scotland, including in cities like Glasgow, which was not historically a Gaelic-speaking area (Dunbar 4-5). There are also many more Gaelic classes within schools now that there ever were before. Although these were few and far between beyond the primary school level at first, the availability of Gaelic language education at a secondary level has increased in recent years. Today, there is a college on the Isle of Skye in which students can get any degree through the medium of Gaelic rather than English (Dunbar 6). There are also Gaelic language programs at several universities across Scotland, including at the University of Edinburgh, where I was studying. Beyond that, there are also subsidized Gaelic language TV shows, radio broadcasts, and other media. Many public authorities have been required to create language plans to explain how they will help expand the use of language in their organizations (Dunbar 18).

The most noticeable effort to expand the use of Gaelic is in signage. At every stop on the train system in Scotland, the stop's name is listed on the sign in both English and Scottish Gaelic (as a result, traveling was a good way to observe the language outside the classroom, at least when reading the railroad signs). Many Scottish organizations, such as Parliament, have signs written in both Scottish Gaelic and English as well. Since all Gaelic speakers are fluent in both English and Gaelic, this move is not practical, but more a token to Scotland's Gaelic heritage.

When I was in Scotland, my Gaelic language professors told us that some of their former students had just unveiled Scottish Gaelic on Duolingo. It was a grassroots effort, taken on by a group of young adults who wanted to see the language used more widely. My professors were excited about the immediate popularity of the language on the site. At that time, there were

already nearly a hundred thousand people learning Scottish Gaelic on Duolingo worldwide. Although it was unlikely that most of these people would go on to become fluent in Gaelic and use it in their everyday lives, the popularity of the language did demonstrate a sizeable interest worldwide in keeping the language alive.

Despite all these efforts, it is not clear that the decline of Gaelic has slowed, much less reversed. Studies have shown that the students who learn Gaelic in school do not seem any more likely to use it outside of school, and not at all likely to teach it to their own children later on, even if they have become fluent Gaelic speakers (Dunmore 70). Despite their proficiency in the language and their recognition of its importance, they do not seem to use it outside the classroom. Gaelic media also seems to have limited effect on the use of the language. While Gaelic media does increase people's exposure to the language, it does not seem to increase their use of it at all (O'Hanlon 2). And while Gaelic media has created jobs for Gaelic speakers, many of them quickly move on to higher-paying jobs in the English media. Additionally, these media jobs are all in cities like Glasgow, which means that the Gaelic speakers have to leave their native Highlands to find work (Dunbar 8). This further weakens the culture of the Highlands, as it draws people away from their homeland to the cities. Thus, despite these efforts, there is little proof that the status of Scottish Gaelic is improving.

Many issues have hindered these efforts to reverse Gaelic's decline. One of the most critical, other than the lack of interest by much of the population, is financial. All of these strategies to reverse the decline—from creating Gaelic-medium education to requiring businesses to create and implement Gaelic language plans—require funding. Because so few people see the benefit of trying to save Gaelic, few are pleased to have their taxes go towards such projects. Many surveys assessing the general attitude towards Gaelic include questions about whether the

respondents think the government is spending enough money on efforts to save Gaelic. The majority of respondents say that the amount of government spending on Gaelic is either “about right,” or “too much” (O’Hanlon 8). Despite the apparent need to expand these efforts in order for them to make any difference, most people are not willing to spend more money on Gaelic. No matter how stridently the Gaels lobby for government-funded initiatives to promote Gaelic, there will be no real change for the language unless popular opinion changes. Given what I observed in Scotland, such a widespread change seems unlikely.



The plight of Gaelic is strikingly different than the plights of other local languages in the UK and Ireland. The situation of the Irish language, for example, provides stark contrast to the situation of Scottish Gaelic.

Irish and Scottish Gaelic are related languages, and their histories are similar. Both are Celtic languages with similar sound systems and some overlap in vocabulary (a parallel would be the relationship between Italian and Spanish, related languages which are similar in some aspects but not enough to be mutually intelligible). Like Scotland, Ireland was once part of the UK. However, Ireland faced much more English settlement than Scotland ever has. Ireland was treated like a practice field for those who would later colonize North America. During this process, the English settlers forced the native Irish to assimilate to British culture. The Irish language became the language of the poor, as the English occupied the upper echelons of society. As with Scottish Gaelic, parents did not teach their children Irish, in hopes that they would learn English and be able to climb the social ladder. As a result, the Irish language almost died out.

After years of often violent conflict, Ireland became independent from the UK in 1921, becoming an independent republic (“Irish Free State”). This led to a resurgence of Irish culture, including the Irish language. The Irish government passed many language acts, just as the Scottish Parliament did, in order to save their native language. The difference was that there was much more popular support for these efforts, and many grassroots attempts to revitalize the language. As a result, the Irish language is thriving today.

The difference between the fate of Scottish Gaelic and that of Irish was the popular interest in preserving the language. The Irish language had much more support than Scottish Gaelic has, which is why some of the same language policies succeeded in Ireland when they failed in Scotland. While Scottish Gaelic seems like a relic, Irish is thriving in the modern world.

This is perhaps most evident in music. All songs in Scottish Gaelic are old folk songs, passed down from generation to generation, recorded by singers who want to preserve the culture of their ancestors. None of it is new material. This is not the case with Irish music. In searching for songs in Scottish Gaelic while I was in Scotland, I came across a rock band called Seo Linn, a group of young men who wrote and performed songs in Irish. They also advocate for increased Irish language education and encourage people to use the language in their everyday lives. The fact that such a band exists in Ireland, with a sizeable fanbase, demonstrates how much more popular the Irish language is than Scottish Gaelic. It enjoys a place in popular culture that Scottish Gaelic does not.

I wondered if a similar band existed that sang in Scottish Gaelic, whether that would make any difference in the popular opinion towards the language. If there was a band that tried to make the language seem less like an antique, would it motivate more Scots to learn the

language? Perhaps it would, but realistically, I knew that with so little popular interest to begin with, a band like that would be unlikely to get off the ground.



When the Scots would ask me “why bother?” when I said I was learning Gaelic, I didn’t have a good answer for them. Not because I didn’t have any arguments as to why people should learn it, but because I had far too many.

It is nearly impossible to imagine English dying out the way Scottish Gaelic is, given how widely spoken it is. But try to imagine what that would be like if English was an endangered language. What would be lost?

On a personal level, you would likely be losing the language that your parents and grandparents grew up speaking. If your grandparents only spoke English, but you did not, how would you communicate with them? Even if they did know the language you spoke well enough to get a point across, it would be difficult not to be able to talk to them in their first language. Immigrant families often have this issue, if they move to a country where the dominant language is not the same as in their homeland. The longer they live in the new country, the more likely it is that the generations after them will lose the language of their ancestors. Imagine what wisdom and what stories are lost when the younger generations cannot understand the language of the older ones.

On a larger scale, you would be losing a culture. You would lose the idioms, sayings, and words native to that language that don’t survive translation. More than that, you would lose a way of viewing the world. Psychologists and linguists are not entirely sure of the limits of how the language you speak shapes the way you perceive the world, but it is clear that it does. Each

language represents a unique cognitive reality (Boroditsky 12:31). When you lose a language, you are not only losing a set of words and grammar; you are losing a unique way of making sense of the world.

You would also be losing all the stories in that language, both those that are written down and those that are transmitted orally. It is no secret that aspects of a work of literature's beauty and meaning are lost when it is translated. Ideas cannot always be translated verbatim, and often you miss the point if you only get the gist of what is being said. In texts concerned only with facts, this is less of an issue, but written works of art often do not translate well. This is especially true with poetry. With translated poetry, you lose the rhythm and many of the poem's key images in the process. The translator must take liberties in their translation; in many cases, the translated work is just the poem rewritten in the translator's words, with all their biases. The result might be beautiful, but it isn't the same as reading the original. While I enjoyed reading the translated poems in my Celtic Literature in Translation class, I knew that I wasn't experiencing the poems fully, as I could not speak the language in which they were written. Parts of the poems didn't translate well, which was why our professors had to spend so much time explaining the cultural context to us.

There are plenty of arguments as to why language loss is a sad process. In my Gaelic class, we read several documents arguing for and against saving Scottish Gaelic. One of these documents included a quote by Iain Crichton Smith, a Scottish writer who said, "For the [Gaelic] islander to lose his language utterly would be to lose, to a great extent, the meaning of his life..." (Smith 37). Although some Scots dismiss the Gaelic language as useless and antiquated, for others it is their way of life, a way of life that is in jeopardy. Language gives meaning to your reality, and to have your language be killed off is to nullify the legitimacy of that reality.

Chapter 17- Chasing Gaelic

Well aware that Scottish Gaelic was in decline, I was determined to experience as much of it as I could while in Scotland. As a result, despite my limited knowledge of the language, I decided to join the University of Edinburgh's Scottish Highland society. It was called *An Comann Ceilteach*, and is one of the oldest societies at the university ("The Highland Society"). It is a society dedicated to maintaining Highland Gaelic culture, including through Gaelic language.

The first meeting was on a Wednesday night at Teviot, the student union building. The common room where they were slated to meet looked like the Gryffindor common room in *Harry Potter*, except with a bar. I soon realized that the meeting was less of a meeting than a gathering. There was no agenda except to socialize and have fun. The vast majority of the members had brought musical instruments with them, from guitars to flutes to violins, and, of course, bagpipes. They launched into the most Scottish jam-session one could imagine, playing upbeat Scottish reels that filled the small space with bright and merry sounds. It was difficult to talk to the other people in the club over the music, but I didn't really mind. Even though it was a Gaelic club, everyone spoke in English, which allowed me to talk with the others in the club without feeling out of place.

I got involved in conversation with an American girl named Bri who was in my Gaelic class and a Scottish boy named Cameron who was from Glasgow (I later discovered that Glaswegians have a distinct accent, and that Cameron's accent was a perfect example of it). Bri was from California and was studying abroad in Scotland for the semester like me, taking classes in Scottish culture and history.

Bri mentioned a ceilidh that was going on that evening (ceilidh, a Gaelic word, is pronounced 'kay-lee'). She asked Cameron whether he was going, and he said yes, he was planning to meet his friends there soon. Then she asked me if I was going. I told her I hadn't even known there was a ceilidh that night.

"Have you ever been to a ceilidh?" Cameron asked. When I said no, he said, "You have to come! They're so much fun!" That was a commonly held opinion in Scotland. Nearly everyone I had encountered told me I had to go to a ceilidh before I left Scotland. A ceilidh was a Scottish dance, which someone described to me as "the kind of dancing Scots do while drunk at a wedding." Needless to say, I was intrigued. Although it was late on a Wednesday night, and I had class the next morning, I agreed to go along.

I expected the ceilidh to be an official university event, put on by some society or another. Instead, it was at a bar with adults of all ages and backgrounds. It reminded me of going two-stepping back home. The bar was packed with people, and a sea of them covered the dance floor. Bri, Cameron, and I braved the tide and joined in.

Admittedly, I am a horrible dancer when left to my own devices, but luckily the band would call the steps before each song, explaining what the song was called, how many people you needed in your group for each one, and what the steps were. It was even better that I had a native Scot to dance with, one who knew what he was doing.

"This is the first ceilidh I've gone to without a kilt," Cameron confessed to me during one of the dances.

"You should have worn your kilt!" I replied.

The dancefloor was utter chaos, packed with people of varying levels of sobriety and knowledge of the steps. People ran into me and stepped on my feet more times than I could count. With that many people on the dancefloor at once, there was barely room to dance. But somehow, we managed. And, strangely, I had the most fun I had ever had. I enjoyed the chaotic, joyful energy of the room, the loud, upbeat Scottish music, and the vast number of people. I am not sure that I was any good at dancing, although I managed not to step on anyone's feet. Even dances like waltzes and two-steps, which sounded like they should have been familiar to me, were completely different than the dances I knew. I had no idea what I was doing, but I was having too much fun to care.



Bri quickly became one of my closest friends in Scotland, because she was as interested in Scottish Gaelic as I was. We never discussed why we were both so intrigued by it, but there was a mutual understanding that when offered an opportunity to experience Gaelic, we would both want to go.

Our first Gaelic-related outing after the ceilidh was a Gaelic lecture put on by the university. I suppose it should have occurred to us that this lecture would not only be about Gaelic, but also in Gaelic. We didn't realize that until we arrived at the lecture and the woman who welcomed us in asked us if we wanted a headset so we could hear a translation.

We were the only undergraduate students in the room, and were by far the youngest people in the room aside from the speaker, a PhD student who was studying Gaelic placenames and who grew up performing Gaelic songs in a traditional Gaelic competition called the Mod. Everyone else in the room was over fifty, and most were significantly older than that.

The translation was nearly useless. The woman who was doing the translation was listening to the lecture from behind a curtain and had to whisper so as not to talk over the speaker. She also had to pause for long periods of time in order to hear what the speaker said, come up with a translation, and repeat it to us. Thus, it was very hard to follow. Still, I enjoyed hearing Gaelic being used. The rhythm of the language reminded me of a stormy sea crashing against a sheer cliff of volcanic rock. The language isn't always beautiful—in fact, often it is harsh-sounding—but it is fascinating to listen to.

It was a shame I didn't understand more of the lecture, because the topic fascinated me. Many of the English names for Scottish places came from the Scottish Gaelic names for them. Inverness is one of them; in Gaelic, it is called Inbhir Nis, which is pronounced similarly to the English name (“Inverness”). Many names have shifted significantly over time as they were anglicized and passed down over generations. One of the biggest efforts to save Gaelic involved replacing all the signs at every train station throughout Scotland to include both the English and the Gaelic names for the places. When looking at those signs, it is often clear how the Gaelic name might have shifted to become the English name we use today. I would have enjoyed hearing about how those names shifted over time, and why.

What's more, placenames link the language to the landscape. You can tell where Gaelic was spoken based on where the Gaelic-derived placenames are. Placenames also tell you something about how the people viewed the land they were living on. Whether the name relates to an aspect of the landscape or to a myth from the area, that gives you some idea of the culture. In some ways, the names themselves are like Ebenezers, telling you why a place was important in the culture. I would have loved learning more about the stories behind these names, linking more stories to the landscape I was becoming more and more familiar with.

At the lecture, we were given a pamphlet that advertised a Gaelic concert a week or so later. Bri and I agreed to go together. The concert was at a church, a building which did not appear to be a church until you went inside, as it was tucked unassumingly between several other buildings on the street. The concert was put on by the Gaelic society of Edinburgh, who was responsible for several Gaelic events throughout the city.

Bri and I expected to hear professional Gaelic singers in a sleek, well-produced concert. It turned out to be more like a senior-citizen talent show in Gaelic, with the level of organization you'd expect from an elementary-school play. All of the participants seemed to be older than sixty, and the only ones in the audience who were younger than that were Bri, me, and the six-year-old grandson of one of the audience members. Some of the participants were in fact real Gaelic singers who performed in small competitions, but many were amateurs. One man tried to recite a Robert Burns poem and made it about halfway through it before his memory failed him. It took him several tries to complete the poem, with lots of help from the audience. The group had also hired a young bagpiper, a high-school student who did not seem to be at all pleased to be spending his Saturday evening this way. It was a rag-tag production, but it was endlessly entertaining.

The Gaelic performers sang traditional Gaelic folk songs, mostly love songs and ballads. I didn't know nearly enough Gaelic to understand them, but usually the singers would explain the songs in English before they sang. Although I didn't understand the songs, I enjoyed them.

During intermission—after we watched an old man play a concertina and then an out-of-tune fiddle—one of the women in the Gaelic society of Edinburgh came up to us and asked us what we thought of the event. We told her that we were enjoying it. She then asked us if we would like to perform in their little show. We told her no, thank you, but we didn't know much

Gaelic, and neither of us could sing. She told us that she was a member of a Gaelic singing group, and that some study-abroad students had joined. They didn't know Gaelic either when they started, she said, but they were picking it up quickly. We thanked her for the information, but reiterated that we didn't sing.

As much as I enjoyed the concert, it made me sad that so few young people attended either the concert or the lecture. We saw almost no young Scots at either event. It only seemed to confirm what we were learning in class, that the language was dying because younger generations were not interested in learning it.

A few weeks later, our Gaelic teacher told us about a Gaelic singer named Kathleen MacInnes who was going to be performing at a pub that evening. I reached out to Bri to ask her if she wanted to go with me, but she told me that she couldn't that night, so I went alone.

The pub was in an underground room underneath another pub off the Royal Mile. The pub was much busier than I had anticipated, filled with people waiting to hear the Gaelic singer perform. Unlike at the lecture or the senior talent show, there were many young adults in attendance. Most of them were students in some of my classes—some were studying abroad like I was, and others were from Scotland.

The pub went dark and the room fell silent as the singer got up on the stage to perform. Kathleen MacInnes did not explain the songs in English before she began, as the singers at the senior talent show did. She spoke almost entirely in Gaelic all night long, and the majority of the audience, save for my study-abroad classmates and me, seemed to understand her completely. When she made a joke, they all would laugh. I didn't understand a word she said, but I could tell

the nature of the words by her tone and facial expressions. Occasionally she did offer some explanation in English, but not often. I was left mostly in the dark.

One might expect that this would make it difficult for me to enjoy the experience. That was anything but true. Kathleen MacInnes was mesmerizing to watch and listen to, even though I didn't understand a word. Unlike spoken Gaelic, which sounds like a raging ocean bashing against the cliffs, singing in Gaelic sounds like a river softly flowing through a green forest. It sounds like magic, ancient as time itself, like a portal to another world. I was reassured, finally, that the language was the same one I had fallen in love with so many years ago, when my dad and I stumbled across those songs on iTunes. The songs were just as beautiful and bewitching as I remembered.

I was captivated listening to her sing in a language I couldn't understand, swaying softly in the single spotlight. Gaelic folk songs tend to have memorable choruses that are repeated multiple times throughout the song, and so the audience began to sing along. This was the way many of these old folk songs were designed to be sung. These types of songs were called waulking songs, songs that women would sing while waulking tartan, which refers to the process of beating the cloth so that the threads would hold more tightly together ("waulk, walk, or wauk"). One woman would sing the verses and the rest of them would answer with the chorus each time. Kathleen MacInnes and the audience mimicked this traditional way of singing, reviving a remnant of what life used to be like in Scotland. The audience in the pub sung the chorus in reverent tones, as if we were singing hymns on holy ground. I didn't understand the words, but I was soon able to mimic the sounds and sing along as well.

Listening to her sing, I couldn't imagine why anyone would let the language die out. Some said that the language was useless, that it was not worth learning because almost no one

spoke it anymore. But I didn't see it that way. The poems that I learned about in class demonstrated that Gaelic poetry was a valuable historical source, describing historical events and capturing the feelings of the individuals who lived through them. The language encompasses the opinions and the moral outlook of the Scottish Highlanders, ensuring that it isn't just the winners' side of history that was preserved. But beyond that, the songs and poems have immense artistic value as well. They are beautiful to read and to listen to. Let the language die, and all that knowledge and beauty would disappear forever.

Before going to Scotland and hearing Scottish Gaelic spoken, I had never thought about how a language's sound could reflect a landscape. The images that Gaelic evoked in my imagination when I heard it spoken or sung were undeniably Scottish landscapes. Spoken Gaelic sounded like a stormy sea, like the sea beating against the coasts of Scotland. Sung Gaelic sounded like the forests and glens of the Highlands, crisscrossed with rivers and streams. The Scottish landscape seemed alive with an ancient sort of magic, a magic that Scottish Gaelic seemed to capture. It sounded real and raw with emotions both beautiful and harsh, and held your attention with an iron grip. It seemed that Gaelic could only come from a land like Scotland; it was Scottish to its core.

Chapter 18- Strike

The last day of class before the break, my Gaelic professor told us offhandedly that there was going to be a teacher strike over the few weeks after the break. She said it as though it was something we should have already known about, even though it was the first any of us had heard about it. She explained that many professors, including herself, were going on strike for up to three weeks, unless the university met their demands before that time was up. The professors would keep us updated on what this meant for classes over the rest of the semester.

Much of the circumstances surrounding the strike were unclear. I was never sure of their reasons for striking—I didn't know enough about the university policies to understand their demands, although I think they had something to do with equal pay for women and minorities. No one ever explained what this disruption meant for classes, either. It wasn't clear how we would make up for the lost time. Would we be expected to have read all the readings for the days we would miss, or would we pick back up where we left off? Would our midterms and paper deadlines be shifted? And how much warning would we get before classes restarted, if the university met the strikers' demands? None of it was clear.

Both of my favorite classes were cancelled during the strike. The one that wasn't was the one I liked the least, one called London Life in the Eighteenth Century (I was bitter that I had to take a class about English history when I really wanted to learn about Scottish history. If I wanted to learn about London, I would have studied abroad in London). I had a paper due in that class the week after the strike ended, and because it was unclear what the expectations were for our other classes, I spent much of those weeks off in the library, reading and writing. I also had obligations for Young Life, an organization that I was involved with in Scotland, and I also was a writer for *Hothouse* literary magazine at UT as well. With all these responsibilities—and

because I wasn't sure how much time I would have before the strike ended—I didn't feel comfortable traveling at that time. The last thing I wanted was to go on a trip, only to have classes restart and have to hurry back to Edinburgh and have it turn out that I was several weeks behind on my reading.

Despite all these obligations, I did have more free time than I had in the weeks prior. When I wasn't in class, in the library, or at a Young Life event, I wandered around Edinburgh.

In cities like Edinburgh, no matter how many places you visit, there are always dozens more left to see. I went to the Writer's Museum and to the Elephant House, where JK Rowling allegedly wrote *Harry Potter* (literary research for *Hothouse*, I assure you). I visited the National Museum of Scotland, which had the worst exhibit on Scottish history I had ever seen. I walked along the Waters of Leith, a creek that runs from the center of Edinburgh to the port of Leith, winding through neighborhoods and parks throughout the city. I walked in Princes Street Gardens in the shadow of Castle Rock and shopped in the stores along the vibrant and modern Princes Street.

My favorite thing to do was to hike Arthur's Seat. Since it was five minutes from my front door, going out for a walk in Holyrood Park and up the majestic hill was a simple task. I loved climbing the hill and looking back over Edinburgh, pinning all my memories of my explorations through the city onto the panoramic view of the city.

I don't think I have ever walked as much as I did in the time I spent living in Edinburgh. The city has a vast bus system, and I bought a bus pass my first week, but I hardly ever used it. Buses are stressful for me—there are too many people in a small space, and it is too likely that I will miss my stop and be late to wherever I'm going, or get on the wrong bus. Also, I love to

walk. Walking through the city made me feel as though I was getting to know it better than I would if I simply rode through it. I liked taking my time, dragging out the walk because I had nowhere that I needed to be.

In some ways, I feel like I got to know Edinburgh better in those few weeks than I know Austin. I connected more intimately with Edinburgh because of all the walking I did, crisscrossing the city on my way to nowhere. I knew Austin, but most of the time I drove through it, passing through neighborhoods and streets without much thought, always in a hurry to get somewhere and never taking time to linger. Austin felt like a neighbor that you only know because you've spent so much time living near them. Edinburgh felt like a friend. None of the time I spent wandering the city felt wasted. I started to feel like a local, like I had always been there, even though I knew that was an illusion.



I also spent much of my free time struggling to unravel the mystery of Gaelic. We were supposed to have a test the week after the strike ended, and I was worried that my meager skills would get rusty in those few weeks we didn't have class. I was desperate for practice.

Because so few people speak Gaelic, there are few resources available to teach yourself the language. I had a few books our professors had recommended, plus the packet our Gaelic teacher used as a textbook. While we were only going to be tested on our reading and writing skills in class, I wanted to learn to speak Gaelic. And that was much more difficult. With a bigger language like Spanish, you can find any number of resources online to familiarize yourself with the language. There are vast dictionaries online, many with audio with pronunciations. You can find YouTube tutorials or watch movies on Netflix in Spanish. With

Gaelic, there were almost no online resources to learn the language. There were few dictionaries, and there were no Gaelic TV shows or YouTube tutorials that I could find anywhere online.

If my professor's former students hadn't just launched Gaelic on Duolingo, I don't know what I would have done. The Duolingo lessons didn't match up with our class curriculum, but it gave me the chance to hear the language and become more familiar with the sound system. And it helped me learn some basic words that we skipped over in class while trying to memorize useful phrases.

With most languages on Duolingo, the production seems sleek. All the words sound like they are being said by the same person—or the same robotic voice. There is a clear progression from lesson to lesson, each building on the last, teaching you vocabulary and grammar as you go. With Gaelic, it was not like that at all. It was clear that three different people had been recruited to record the pronunciations for the words, and for some sentences, there was an amalgamation of these three voices. The vocabulary was grouped by topic, but there was very little on the grammar as you went along. It felt rudimentary and piecemeal, like the Gaelic senior citizens concert Bri and I went to.

Still, I admired the amount of work that went into it. I liked hearing the three different and very human voices as I went through the lessons, and could imagine the people behind them. I could imagine them putting together these lessons, building it from scratch all on their own. It was endearing.

Armed with flashcards and Duolingo, I slowly began to unravel the mystery of Gaelic. I began to get it, and was able to recognize words when I saw them or heard them. I was far from

being able to hold a conversation in Gaelic, but I was beginning to make sense of it. The process became thrilling rather than frustrating. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. I felt like I was wandering through the language the way I was walking through the city, getting to know it the way I was getting to know Edinburgh, and becoming familiar and comfortable with it.

Section IV: Scottishness and Belonging

Chapter 19- *Duthchas*, Scotland, and the American South

One night, after watching a rugby game at Teviot—one Scotland lost to their archrivals, the English—I walked across the Meadows to a friend’s flat. That night, a storm had rolled in, one that seemed to come straight out of *Wuthering Heights*. Although it was still early, the night was pitch black as I crossed the park. The rain fell in swift, small droplets, falling almost horizontally in the harsh wind. The wind itself was almost enough to blow me off the tree-lined path and into the mud on either side. Fighting the wind and rain doubled the time it normally took me to walk across the park.

As I walked, two men in their thirties, clearly drunk, ran past me on the path. Neither were wearing raincoats or had umbrellas (in a fight between the Scottish weather and an umbrella, the weather always wins, so only tourists carry umbrellas). In my memory, both are dressed in short sleeves, and their thin shirts stick to their bodies in the rain. As they ran, one of them was singing a famous old Scottish folksong called “Loch Lomond.”

“For ye’ll tak the high road, and I’ll tak the low road,

And I’ll be in Scotland afore ye.

But me and my true love will never meet again

On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.”

The song is about two Scottish soldiers who were fighting in a war on the Continent. Both had been captured, and one was set to be executed while the other was about to be set free. The refrain’s first line about the two roads referred to an old Celtic belief that when a Scot died, his soul would return to Scotland via the low road (McDonald). The other man, the one who

would be released, would return to Scotland in the world of the living, via the high road (McDonald).

The story behind “Loch Lomond” demonstrated a belief system where individuals were spiritually connected to the land. The Scottish soldier’s homeland was so much a part of his identity that his soul would return there after he died. It suggested that the place we come from is so fundamental to who we are that it defines our afterlife.

I don’t believe that our souls will return to the places where we came from after we die, but I was fascinated by that idea. I wondered how that was supposed to work. Did Scots’ souls always return to Scotland? What if they had been born in Scotland but considered somewhere else home? What if they were more of a wanderer, and felt no tie to any one place? What if there was some other place that they’d rather spend eternity?

So many Scots have been displaced over the centuries, forced to emigrate to the US or Canada or other places around the globe. This belief seems to be a shred of hope that they will return to their homeland one day, if not this lifetime, then perhaps in the next. But what about the generations born abroad? Would their souls return to Scotland, a land they had never seen but that defined their cultural heritage? Or would their souls return to the places they were born and grew up?

What does it mean to claim a place as your homeland? What makes a place home? And what makes a Scot a Scot?



The belief laid out in the “Loch Lomond” song is influenced by the Scottish Gaelic concept of *duthchas*. In the most literal terms, the word translates to “birthplace” or “heritage” in

English, but it carries deeper connotations that these English words can't capture. *Duthchas* has to do with belonging to a certain area and being rooted to the ancient lineage that has lived on that land for generations ("Duthchas and Oireachd"). The word demonstrates a link between an individual and their ancestors, connected by the land on which they live. This relationship between land, ancestry, and individual identity is particularly salient in the Scottish Gaelic mind (Bunting). The connection is almost spiritual, in the way that the "Loch Lomond" song presents it.

The shift in the use of the word *duthchas* from referring to a belonging to the land to simply meaning "heritage" or "birthplace" is a good example of what can be lost when a language declines. It shows how language shift can strip language of its cultural background, tearing away some of its most poignant connotations until only the dictionary definition remains. Madeleine Bunting says, "when you lose a language, you lose the world view that it encapsulates" (Bunting). If Gaelic were to die out, the concept of *duthchas* would disappear.

Most Americans don't think of land or ancestry the way the Scottish Gaels do. Even when we search for our ancestry, we don't tend to think of our relationship to our forebearers in conjunction with our relationship to the land. English has no direct translation for the word *duthchas* because we have no concept of such a deep belonging to the land. Our relationship to the past is largely placeless and landless, because most of us don't live in the same place our ancestors did. Most of us cannot trace our tie to the land back generations upon generations, the way the Gaels could.

When Alexis de Tocqueville, a French sociologist, traveled to America in the 1830s, he noticed that Americans lacked a connection to the land that was often found in Old World countries. In countries where primogeniture governs the inheritance of land, a family's property

is passed undivided from one generation to the next. As a result, the “family spirit...becomes materialized in the earth” (Tocqueville 55). Because the family has lived on the land for generations, the land symbolizes the family. “The family represents the land; the land represents the family,” Tocqueville says. In America, where the law requires “equal partition” rather than primogeniture, this “intimate bond that once existed between family spirit and the preservation of the land” is destroyed (Tocqueville 55). As the land is divided up after each generation, there is no longer a piece of land that represents the family’s history. Tocqueville notes that because there is no sentimental tie to the land because of family history, sooner or later the family will sell the land (Tocqueville 55). Because the land is divided after every generation—giving equal share to each child rather than just the oldest, as in primogeniture—it becomes less and less productive as the tract becomes smaller, so the only way it is profitable is to sell it. The Americans, unlike the English landlords and the Scottish Gaels, had no familial lands, and therefore no intimate historical connection with a place.

What’s more, Tocqueville encountered a restlessness in the Americans that seemed to shock him. He says that despite how successful Americans are as a whole, they “never stop thinking about the goods that they do not possess” (Tocqueville 625). Despite all that they have, Americans are concerned about the things they lack; they are never content. They seem “to suffer from perpetual fear of passing away before finding time to enjoy” all the things that this world has to offer (Tocqueville 625). As a result, they are “always in a hurry” (Tocqueville 626). In Tocqueville’s mind, this restlessness is intimately related to the lack of connection with the land. He says that in America, “a man carefully builds a home to live in when he grows old and sells it before the roof is laid” (Tocqueville 625). Because Americans have no real reason to stay in one place, they will move, chasing the next good thing until the day their time runs out. Because

there are no familial lands that tie Americans to a single spot, they give in to this restlessness, and never stay in one place for long (Tocqueville 626).

Tocqueville may have been too quick to generalize about how Americans relate to the land, because not all regions of the US abandoned the Old-World idea of primogeniture. The one place where Americans practiced primogeniture, rather than the multigeniture that Tocqueville described, was the antebellum South (Alston 278). This is due to the existence of large slave-owning plantations in the South. Primogeniture made sure that these large tracts of land were not divided up after every successive generation, but instead were inherited intact (Alston 280). It was slavery that made these plantations profitable, but it was the Old-World concept of primogeniture that allowed them to perpetuate.

These plantation owners had a similar connection to the land that landowners in England and Scotland did. There was a sense of a familial tie to the land because these plantation owners were living on the same land and in the same houses that their ancestors before them did. They would have been able to understand the Scottish Gaelic idea of *duthchas*, as the land and their ancestry were linked.

Mark Twain famously alludes to this similarity between Scottish Gaelic clan chiefs and Southern plantation owners in his book *Life on the Mississippi*. Twain says that many Southerners read Sir Walter Scott's novels about the Scottish Highlands and saw themselves in his romanticized accounts of the Scottish Gaelic clan chiefs (Twain). Like the Scots, these plantation owners felt a historical tie to their family land and a deep sense of family pride as a result, which Scott illustrated in his novels. Twain scorns the way that Scott romanticized these Scottish landlords and mocks the Southern plantation owners for trying to mimic them (Twain). The plantation owners saw themselves as nobility, Twain says, which caused them to have an

overblown sense of honor and of their own importance. As he sees it, this is all Scott's fault. Because of Scott's stories, these plantation owners held onto "an absurd past that is dead," keeping them from adapting to the modern world (Twain). Scott "had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the [Civil War]," Twain claims, "that he is in great measure responsible for the war" (Twain). This tie to the land, which allowed these Southern men to see themselves as analogous to Scottish clan chiefs, is what caused the Civil War to occur, at least in Twain's mind.

Twain's claim that Sir Walter Scott caused the Civil War is ridiculous. It was slavery, not the tie to the land, that led to the Civil War. Still, Twain is not wrong about the similarity between the way these Southern plantation owners and the Scottish Gaels viewed their relationship to the land, due to their ancestral claim to it.

After the Civil War, plantations disappeared. Yet this idea of a connection to a place's past through the land seems to live on in some Southerners, who are proud of the history of the American South. They seem connected to the South as a whole, and value the history and culture of the region. Those who proudly fly the Confederate flag buy into a romanticized view of the American South, one that ignores the tragedies that their forefathers were responsible for. Their pride is problematic, given what the Confederacy stood for, but it is an example of how some Americans maintain a historical connection to the land on which they live.

Less problematically, many Americans in the South remain connected to the land through family farms and ranches that have been passed on through the generations. These people have that symbolic connection between the land and the family spirit that Tocqueville said Americans lack. It seems that farmers and ranchers feel an intimate connection to the land, regardless of how long their family has lived and worked on it, because their lives and livelihoods rely on the

land. They spend their days working the land, and therefore know it well and feel connected to it. This connection may not be exactly like *duthchas*, but it is perhaps the closest Americans can come.

Americans who aren't farmers or ranchers, like me, don't have any such connection to the land. Because we don't live and work the land, and do not have a family inheritance of land, we are not tied to any one place. We live on top of the land, rather than coexisting with it. We move freely, and frequently, chasing careers and education and relationships all over the country and the world, living a largely placeless existence.



I know very few people who have lived their entire lives in one place. If our souls did return to a place after we died, the way the Scottish Gaels believed, where would their souls go? The place where they were born? Or the place they considered home? But what if they had more than one home?

I had to interview my mother for an anthropology class recently, and one of the topics we covered was identity. I asked her if she considered being an Austinite or a Texan to be an important part of her identity. I was shocked when she told me no. As an army brat, she moved every few years when she was growing up. When her father retired, her family settled in Texas. My mother has now lived in Texas since she was a teenager. The vast majority of her life has been spent here, and a large portion of that time has been spent in Austin. Yet because of her rootlessness growing up, she doesn't consider herself a Texan or an Austinite. Austin is home now, but she told me she could easily make a home somewhere else.

Most people I know are like my mom. They might live in Austin, at least part of the time, but that doesn't mean that they consider themselves Austinites. Most of my college friends have moved to Austin from another city, and now have a life here as well as a life back home. One of my best friends from high school grew up in Austin but moved to Massachusetts for college, and now moves back and forth with the changing seasons, calling each place home. My other best friend was born in Georgia, but moved to Austin when she was young. Her younger brother chose to go back to Georgia for college, returning to the first home they ever knew.

Few of the people I know have just one city that they call home. If their souls were to return to a place after they passed on, where would they go? It is impossible to say, since so many of them don't profess loyalty to one place over another. Instead, it seems that they have pieces of themselves scattered over several different places where they have lived, and where the people they love reside. They have built different aspects of their lives in different places, making choosing just one home impossible.

Until I went to Scotland, I didn't understand this point of view. Before that, Austin was the only home I'd ever known. My feelings about Austin were the exact opposite of my mom's: I couldn't imagine growing up anywhere else. I thought about moving away after college, but I wasn't sure I could ever pull myself away from this place. It wasn't so much that I felt like I belonged in Austin, but that I couldn't imagine starting over somewhere new.

My father is the same. There are very few people I know who are as deeply rooted to a single city as my father is. He has lived here his whole life, and has no intentions of leaving. His entire life has been built here; he cannot uproot himself without disrupting every aspect of it. Knowing him makes the Scottish belief about souls make more sense. Until I went to Scotland, I felt the same.

Going to Scotland helped me understand the other side of this idea more than I ever had. Before, I had never understood how people could divide themselves between two different places, calling both of them home. My first year at UT, I was insistent that my dorm room was not home. Whenever my mom would call it that I would get defensive, because I didn't think of that little cinderblock room as my home. I had no emotional attachment to it, even though it was the place that I escaped to while I was living on campus. When I moved into an apartment, I understood a little more, but still both places I called home were in one city. It was where all my most important relationships were; that was the only place my heart lived.

Going to Scotland, I started to understand what it felt like to call two different places home. It was an odd feeling, because I knew my stay in Edinburgh was temporary. As it turned out, my stay was even shorter than I anticipated. But the longer I was there, the more it started to feel like home. I built relationships with people I cared about there, but I also cared about the place itself. I felt connected to Scotland; I felt like I belonged there. That made no sense to me, because I had no claim to the place whatsoever. It wasn't home, but it felt like it was. And I couldn't puzzle out why.

I began to understand a little more about what my mom meant about making a home anywhere. I began to understand what she must have felt when she was growing up in Germany, living in a place that was only a temporary home. I understood what it felt like to build Ebenezers in a foreign place, and how the memories you build there tie you to the place, even though you have no claim of ownership to it. Just as we define places based on the layers of history that we stack up there, places form layers of our identity, building up who we are as we build memories there. Each place we visit and form an attachment to shapes who we are, even if it isn't really home.

Chapter 20- Heritage and Identity

In the same way that we attach meanings to places, places give meaning to us. The identities we create for ourselves and the identities others ascribe to us are affected by the places we were born, the places we grew up, and the places that we live. Sometimes these identities are ones we embrace, like how my dad wears cowboy boots as his formal work shoes. Others are identities people assign to us based on the assumptions they have about people who come from certain places.

When I was in Scotland, whenever someone asked me where I was from (as every person I met abroad did, sooner or later), I always told them I was from Texas rather than saying I was from the United States. People could tell that I was an American the first time they heard me speak; usually, they would comment on it right after I introduced myself. If I told them I was from the US, I wasn't telling them anything they didn't already know. Telling them I was a Texan, however, told them something more about who I was.

I never thought much about being a Texan until I went to Scotland, because until then most people around me were Texans themselves. The ones who weren't at least knew enough Texans that I didn't owe them any explanations. In Scotland, however, I was usually the only Texan in the room. Most non-Americans that I met in Scotland were fascinated by the fact that I was from Texas, as many of them had never met a Texan before. Some of them seemed to have an idea of what a Texan should be like, and were surprised when I didn't fit that mold.

While I was volunteering with an organization called Young Life, I often worked alongside a Scottish youth pastor. A few weeks after we'd met, he asked where I was from. When I told him that I was from Texas, he responded, "I don't detect much of an accent."

Though he had likely met few Texans in his lifetime, if any, he had an idea of what they were supposed to sound like. And I didn't sound that way at all.

Another time, when I told a girl from church that I was from Texas, she asked if Texas was as crazy as they thought it was. I asked her what she meant and she blushed, bringing up the Bible Belt and the ultra-conservative Christians that supposedly lived there. I told her that some parts of Texas are like that, but not the part I'm from. Not Austin. I wasn't offended by her questions, but I wondered what she and the others assumed about me, if that was the idea that they had of what Texas was like.



Although I met a handful of students that were from Scotland, the vast majority of the local students I met were from other places around the UK and Ireland. The University of Edinburgh has a huge international student population, making students from Scotland seem more like the exception than the norm. I didn't meet a single college student in Edinburgh who was from Edinburgh.

I never asked, but I wondered how long it took for all of them to feel like they belonged in Edinburgh. I wondered if any of them ever felt out of place in that historic city, especially those who weren't from Scotland.

Those who weren't from Scotland never called themselves Scottish, no matter how long they had been in the country. My Young Life area director in Scotland was an American from Georgia, and his wife was from California. Both had been in Scotland for at least a decade, but neither ever called themselves Scottish. Neither did any of the Northern Irish people I met, many of whom had been in Scotland for years as well, and who seemingly had no intention to leave.

They were like JK Rowling, who is not considered a Scottish author, even though she wrote much of *Harry Potter* in Edinburgh and has lived in Scotland for many years since. Her characters may have been born here, but she was not, so despite all the time she had spent there, she is not a Scot.

To be Scottish, one has to have been born there. Simply living there, for any period of time, does not cut it. This is different from in the US, where people who have lived most of their lives in the US proudly declare themselves to be Americans, whether they were born here or not. In Scotland, this doesn't seem to be the case.

At the same time, those of Scottish descent all over the world proudly claim to be Scottish, even if they weren't born there. Sometimes they make this claim even if they have never set foot on Scottish soil. Many Scots have emigrated to other places around the world over the centuries, forced to leave Scotland because of infertile land, greedy landlords, or political persecution. Many families have now lived somewhere other than Scotland for generations, in places like Canada or the US, but still consider themselves Scottish.

Heritage, it seems, is key. Even if you weren't born in Scotland, you could call yourself Scottish if you could definitively trace your ancestry back to Scotland. One could likely argue that if you weren't born in Scotland, you aren't really Scottish, but I never heard any Scots argue that. Then again, I never heard anyone who wasn't born in Scotland claim to be Scottish while I was there.



Many Americans obsess over figuring out where their family is from. They love tracing their ancestry through online databases and DNA tests to construct a family tree. Much of that

has to do with the fact that the vast majority of Americans are not originally from America. Few Americans can trace their ancestry back to Native Americans, and even fewer can say they are mostly Native American. Most of us are the children of immigrants, even if those immigrants came over to America hundreds of years ago. Over that time, many people of different nationalities came together, making families that were an amalgamation of cultures. Each of us are a melting pot in and of ourselves. We are Americans, but that identity can only stretch back so far. We may be from here, but nearly all of us can trace our families back to people who were not.

We want to trace our roots back to a starting point because so many of us don't have roots where we live now. We are looking for a history that we don't have here. We are looking for a foundation.

An entire industry has been built upon this search. Genealogy research is a common hobby worldwide and is thought to be the "second most common use of the internet" (Basu 2). Ancestry.com wouldn't exist if there wasn't a market for it, and the DNA tests that accompany it nowadays wouldn't be nearly as popular if people weren't interested in finding their roots. There is even an industry called heritage tourism for people who want to travel to the places their ancestors came from.

People of Scottish heritage are particularly keen on tracing their roots. Over the centuries, especially since the Highland Clearances, many Scots have been forced to emigrate to other places around the world. These diasporic Scots are fascinated by investigating their heritage. Many return to Scotland, driven by a "idealized myth of the homeland" (Dalglish 379-80). They buy into the idealized view of Scotland created by a combination of their family's stories and popular accounts of the country by Scott and others. These Scottish descendants are looking for

some connection to the land that their ancestors had to leave. They are looking for meaning for themselves in the present by tracking down their family's past.

The Scots reportedly don't mind this heritage tourism. In fact, it is such an important industry in Scotland that the Scottish Parliament tagged it as a key market they should target (Basu 2). These diasporic Scots chasing their roots back to the homeland make up a crucial portion of tourists in Scotland, one that the Scots can't ignore, despite how misguided these tourists might be about the realities of Scotland. Tourism is especially important in remote areas such as the Highlands and Islands, which have few other sources of income (Basu 2). I am sure the Scots welcome these visitors. The Scots are proud of their cultural heritage and glad to share it with whoever is willing to learn about it. Often, the Scots do little to dispel the idealized myths about Scotland's history. Instead, they often magnify them, telling exaggerated tales that may have little to do with the truth.



I did a family tree project in middle school, where our teacher told us to trace our family history back until we got to the point where all of the branches ended with someone who wasn't from the US. She failed to account for the fact that, even though we all come from immigrants, some of us have ancestors who have been here for a very, very long time. She also failed to account for overachievers. Put simply, she failed to account for someone like me.

My tree was massive, with arms reaching back to many European countries. On some branches, I only had to go back three generations to find the first of my ancestors who came to America. On others, I had to go back beyond the 17th century. I traced my family back to Hungary, Germany, France, England, Ireland, and Scotland.

At the end, I wasn't sure what to do with all of it. What did that tree tell me about who I was? I saw the project as an interesting pastime, but little more. I didn't think my family's past defined my present in any way.

I didn't go to Scotland looking for my ancestors. That was not one of the questions that I was carrying in my head when I was packing up to go. I didn't think it was relevant whether my family was from Scotland or not. After all, I wasn't going to claim to be Scottish, because I had little data to back that up.

While I was in Scotland, however, I wondered how many of my ancestors came from Scotland. By the time I arrived there, it had been nearly a decade since I had done the family tree project. I had lost the assembled family tree I made on a piece of poster board years before. The only background information I had left was a list of names in a disorganized Excel sheet, buried deep in the recesses of my laptop. All I really had to go on was my father's insistence that we had ancestors from Scotland. I wondered if that was true, and if that heritage accounted for why I was so comfortable in Scotland. I wondered if the "Loch Lomond" song had a point, if my soul was drawn to Scotland because it was where my ancestors were from. I wondered if *duthchas* held true, even dozens of generations after my family left the country. I wasn't sure I believed that, but it made for a good story.

I haven't been able to uncover many Scottish ancestors in my scattered Excel sheets. Some of the sheets were incomplete, and others have been lost, so it is hard to say for sure how many of my ancestors came from Scotland. It would take too much work to recreate all that research I did years ago, requiring more effort that I am willing to put in. Maybe, deep down, I don't want to ruin the story.

Chapter 21- Texas's Castle Doctrine and Scotland's Land Policy

Kinnoull Hill in Perth is tucked back in a neighborhood, making it difficult to reach. There were no signs that led to the hill, no markers to tell you how to get there, and no discernable spot where the neighborhood ends and the hill begins. As I made my way there to go hiking, I felt strange walking through the neighborhood because I wasn't a resident. I felt like I was walking somewhere I wasn't supposed to.

I didn't get to hike nearly as much as I wanted in the short time that I was in Scotland. After I got back to the States, I started researching places to hike in Scotland, in the hopes I would someday go back and check off all the places I had missed. In the process, I learned that in Scotland, it is legal to hike and even camp on any area that is not fenced in, even if it is privately-owned land. When people hike the West Highland Way, a long trail along Scotland's western coast, they can set up camp wherever they please. They can hike through the Highlanders' lands, even if it is off the trail, so long as they don't get close enough to the house to disturb the inhabitants. These rules are laid out in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which lays out the rights and responsibilities of both the landowners and hikers ("Information Note"). The law seems to do more for the hikers than for the landowners, ensuring that the landowners cannot keep the hikers off the land.

Until I read that, I had never thought that the way Americans treat the public-versus-private land distinction as anything but the norm. In the US, to walk on someone else's land without permission is trespassing. I thought this would be the case anywhere that private land ownership is practiced. The American way of dealing with land ownership is so deeply ingrained in my mind that I never considered that there was any other way to think of it.

To me, walking on someone else's land feels like an invasion. Perhaps that is a Texas thing. Land ownership is a mark of pride in Texas, and part of it lies in knowing that the land is for your use and yours alone. Additionally, in Texas law, there is what is called the castle doctrine, which says you have a right to use deadly force against someone who you feel is invading your home and who poses a threat to you or your family's well-being (McInnes). Sometimes, your life depends on knowing where you can and cannot go. Little wonder, then, that I balk at the idea of walking on someone else's land without their permission.

The way that the Scots treat land does not mean that they do not value privacy. In fact, they value it more highly than most Americans do. In talking to one of my friends from Glasgow, I mentioned how strange it was to me that dogs in Scotland seem indifferent to strangers. I told him that if you went to a park in Texas, it was not unusual for someone's dog to run up to you expecting to be petted, even if the dog was on a leash. When I walked through the Meadows, as I did nearly every day, I would see people out with their dogs, and had never had a dog come up to me like that. He told me that it was probably a privacy thing; a person's dog was their dog, and that was widely accepted. He said most people would probably let you pet their dog if you asked, but you wouldn't walk up to someone else's dog on the street and start petting them, because it wasn't yours.

The British—whether they were from Scotland, England, or Northern Ireland—also valued the privacy of their bedrooms much more than Americans do. In Austin, it is not usual for college students to share a bedroom with another person. In the dorms, having a roommate is expected, unless you are willing to pay extra to get your own room. Even in apartments or houses, most students share rooms. It is all about cost effectiveness; having your own room is a luxury that relatively few college students can afford. I have friends who share rooms with two

or even three other people in order to keep the cost of living down. This would be unheard of in Scotland. In the dorms at the University of Edinburgh, each resident got their own room. If you wanted a roommate you had to request it, and have a good reason for it (what constitutes a good reason, I do not know). Of all the people I knew in Edinburgh who lived in flats, not one shared a room with anyone else. They universally valued privacy over cost effectiveness.

Clearly, it isn't as though the Scot's have a "what's mine is yours" attitude regarding everything, but they do treat land more communally than we in America do.

This has to do with the way the Highland clans thought about land ownership and use. In the clan system, the clan chief owned the clan lands, but all members of the clan were allowed to use the land for farming and grazing. Land was owned by an individual, but it was used collectively.

This is where the idea of *duthchas* comes in. It was the governing concept of land ownership and use in the Highlands. The collective claim on and use of the land reinforced the idea of *duthchas*, through interaction with the land itself (Bunting). As the individuals of the clan lived and worked on the land, which their ancestors also worked and lived on, they felt this deep connection to it. This connection formed the foundation of their claim to it. Legally speaking, they didn't own the land, but they viewed it as their own.

This system of land use existed for hundreds of years, until it gave way to the capitalistic system of land ownership ("Duthchas and Oireachd"). The shift from feudalism to capitalism in the Scottish Highlands played a crucial role in the destruction of traditional ways of life. The collective claim on the land through *duthchas* no longer mattered; what mattered was the clan

chief's title to the land. As a landlord, he could use the land as he liked, and therefore could drive the people off the land as he wished.

Traditionally, clan chiefs were paternalistic leaders of the clan. They were expected to protect and care for their clansmen like family. During the 18th century and onwards, however, clan chiefs were more concerned with becoming rich, in order to take part in the market economy and gain standing in the British social hierarchy. The chiefs began to act like landlords, charging their clansmen rent to live on and use the land. They no longer allowed clansmen to use clan land collectively for farming or grazing. Instead, they divided up their land into small tracts called crofts for individual families to rent and use. The crofts were often tiny and infertile, barely able to support the crofters that lived on them. The landlords could also charge ridiculously high rents and evict crofters with little prior warning. Those who weren't evicted often had to leave because they could no longer support themselves. Many crofters were forced to emigrate from the Highlands, either to the Lowlands or to other countries around the world in order to survive. This process was known as the Highland Clearances, and was one of the reasons for the Scottish diaspora. This is largely why there are so many people of Scottish descent scattered across the globe.

The clan chiefs were no longer concerned about their clansmen's wellbeing, so they had no qualms about running the crofters off the land. They were only concerned with profit. Many landlords forced the crofters out in order to convert their lands into large-scale sheep farms, which allowed them to make more off of their otherwise infertile lands (Dalglish 374). Even today the joke is that there are more sheep in the Highlands than people, a joke that is painful in its accuracy.

These landlords demonstrated a sense of placelessness, just like many Americans do. Madeleine Bunting argues that this placelessness is a necessary element of capitalism, which is only interested in profit, in taking what it can from the land until it has been bled dry and then moving on. She quotes John Berger, who said, “the historic role of capitalism is to destroy history itself, to sever any link with the past” (Bunting). Capitalism destroys *duthchas*. It is not interested in who lived in the land before; it is only interested in who owns the land now, and what can be gained from it. This seems to explain why Americans, who live in a country run on capitalism, have so little connection to the land on which they live, and why they move so often.



The problems that Highland crofters faced remain to the present day. In recent years, much legislation has been passed in order to reverse the effects of the Clearances. Crofters have been given more rights to fair rents and more protections against evictions. A lot of the legislation has to do with land ownership and use. The Land Act of 2005 was one of the most recent and important pieces of legislation. It allowed public access to lands for things like hiking and camping and gives communities with historical connections to a certain area the opportunity to buy that land (Dalglish 374-5). In many ways, it reverts to the old ideas of land ownership and collective use, returning to the idea of *duthchas*.

Today, land ownership in the Highlands is often a point of contention. There are many houses in the Highlands which have been bought by Europeans to use as vacation homes. This angers the Highlanders, who want the land to remain in the hands of the Scottish.

The Highlanders also often balk at clan chiefs who own large tracts of land for their own use. One example is the Estate of Sleat on the Isle of Skye. In 1971, the clan chief Lord

MacDonald was at risk of having to sell the estate because he could not afford to pay the death duties that arose upon his father's passing (Dalglish 381). Lord MacDonald could not imagine selling the estate. It was the last of the traditional MacDonald clan lands in Scotland, and if it were sold, it would likely be bought by a stranger (Dalglish 381). His solution was to set up the Clan Donald Land Trust to buy back the lands on behalf of the clan, so that he could continue living on it. Lord MacDonald appealed for help from the clan on behalf of this trust, asking for donations from the entire MacDonald clan, both in Scotland and around the world in order to buy back the land (Dalglish 381). He evoked the clan's past as rulers of the Lordship of the Isles, a de facto kingdom ruled by the MacDonalds on the Scottish Isles, in order to gain support, showing why it was important to the clan that he remain the owner of the land. In the end, the trust was able to raise enough money to purchase the land and keep it in clan hands in the name of the trust.

Although many people donated to the trust, many clan members were angered by this charade. They knew that Lord MacDonald was not buying the clan for the good of the clan, but for his own benefit. These clan members pointed to the fact that they had been forced off the land generations before during the Clearances as proof that he wasn't concerned for the clan (Dalglish 385). The chief argued that the castle on the manor was now a tourist site, which raised revenue for the surrounding town. Additionally, the museum on the site was a protector of clan history. He insisted that all this showed that he was doing it for the good of the clan. But this did little to satisfy the angry clan members.

Many clan members still hold the traditional ideas of communal land use, even though the traditional clan system has been mostly extinct for generations. These traditional values, passed down through the ages, still survive today. They color the way modern-day Highlanders

view the land and its owners. This is why the Scottish view socialism more favorably than some other nations do (Dalglish 384). This puts them in sharp contrast with most Americans, who hold more capitalistic and individualistic views. The American dream is about working for and owning things for yourself, which does not fit well with socialism. In Scotland, however, socialism fits in better with their traditional values.

One evening, a Scot I met asked me what I thought of Bernie Sanders and his socialist policies. I told him that I didn't think Sanders would ever be elected president. So many people, including many Texans, claim that socialism is un-American. Texas would throw a fit if a socialist was elected president. In Texas, where working hard and earning things for yourself is so deeply ingrained in the culture, socialism is seen as unfair. Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps is the law of the land, and those who have worked for all that they have insist that everyone else ought to do the same. The American dream claims that anyone can, so many believe that those who don't succeed aren't trying hard enough. Many in the American South, especially among older generations, cannot seem to comprehend of any other way of life. They don't seem to understand that not everyone is capable of working their way to success because not everyone has access to the right opportunities or resources. This issue often has a racial tint to it—non-white Americans are often the ones who lack these resources, and so are stuck in a cycle of poverty, and many white Americans fail to see this divide. There is a lack of understanding of others' situations, because some think that their own unique experience is the norm.

The opposite outlook prevails in Scotland, in a land full of crofters who have tried to work their way up but can barely survive. They seem to understand that just because some can climb the mountain to success, that doesn't mean that everyone can. They value what they

have—their privacy and their belongings—but they don't see this as mutually exclusive to sharing. They seem to find a middle ground between the things they keep to themselves and the things they share with others.

With land ownership, they value communal use coupled with private ownership. They express bitterness towards those who refuse to share their land for the good of others. Land reform acts, such as the one passed in 2005, demand a return to a return to the traditional Scottish way of life, which they see as the natural order of things (Dalglish 386). The Scots believe that people shouldn't put themselves above others, and should recognize their common Scottishness, and their common humanity.

Section V: Christianity in Scotland

Chapter 22- Church Hopping and Evangelism

Before I left for Edinburgh, I met one of my friends for lunch. I told her about what I was going to do in Scotland, the classes I planned to take, where I was going to be living, and all the places I was hoping to visit. After all of that, she asked me, “Do you know where you’re going to go to church in Scotland?”

I paused, realizing that I hadn’t thought about it. In all the things I was trying to figure out about Scotland, the idea of finding a church hadn’t crossed my mind.

I started researching what Christianity was like in Scotland. Typing in just those two words—Christianity and Scotland—produced a slew of articles about how Christianity in Scotland was on the decline.

The story was this: once, Scotland had been a thriving Christian nation. Today, this is not the case. According to a 2017 census, only 7.2% of Scots attend church regularly, which is down from 17% in the 1980s (“Dramatic Drop”). Compare this to the 38% of Americans who attend church weekly or almost weekly (Douthat). Most of the people who attend church in Scotland now are older adults. Over time, those adults are dying off, and there are no young people to replace them, so the church population as a whole is declining. Like Scottish Gaelic, Christianity is not being passed on to younger generations. This was especially true in the Highlands, where churches were small and few to begin with.

Part of the reason behind the decline was how stifling the church could be. Christian churches in the UK used to police people’s actions to maintain social control. One sect in Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, was especially strict, forbidding music and

dancing because they considered it a sin (McFaddon). Most of the harshest sects in Scotland were ones located in the Highlands, where Christianity today is at its weakest.

The parts of the article that were most striking to me were the ones that talked about how few young adults and teenagers were Christians. I was used to being surrounded by Christians my age—I was involved in Young Life, a Christian ministry comprised mostly of college students, and every church I had ever been to had a large student population. Every church I had ever heard of seemed to have some sort of Sunday school or youth group. I tried to imagine what a church without that would be like, and couldn't.



On my second Sunday in Edinburgh, I started searching for a church. The first one I found online was three blocks from my dorm, so I decided to start there. I had passed the building a half dozen times in the first two weeks I was in Edinburgh, but it never registered that it was a place of worship, even though its façade looked much more church-like than most in the city. I went in and sat down in an empty seat in the middle of the room.

It soon became obvious that I was the only college student in attendance. Everyone was either parents with toddlers or adults over sixty. I think I was the only person between the ages of six and thirty in the room. The church body was small enough—less than fifty people, I'd estimate—that any newcomer would stand out. Because I stood out so glaringly, a woman approached me and welcomed me to the church. The woman introduced me to one of her friends, a nice old Scottish woman who asked me why I was in Edinburgh, what I was studying, and how I was finding Edinburgh so far (a phrase, I had learned, that translated to “what do you think of it?” in American English).

The sea of toddlers ran around the church during the worship time, until they were ushered off to Sunday School during the sermon. I don't remember anything about the sermon now, only that it was one that I had heard a thousand times before. Afterwards, the woman beside me asked me how I found it. I told her it was nice. I think both of us knew that I wouldn't be coming back.

I had expected the articles about Christianity in Scotland to be wrong. Surely there had to be some people my age in Edinburgh who were Christians? It seemed ridiculous to think that I would be the only one. After church that morning, however, I wasn't so sure.

My worry had little to do with the size of the church itself and more to do with the fact that there were no young adults around for me to relate to. I wasn't worried about the spiritual state of Scotland. I was worried that I wouldn't have anyone who understood where I was coming from, that I wouldn't have a community of people who believed what I did.

This is not to suggest that you cannot find community in groups where people have different beliefs than you do. Sometimes, the greatest growth comes from groups where your beliefs are challenged. I love engaging with people who believe different things than I do, because comparing our worldviews helps me to figure out more about what I believe and why. But this can become exhausting when you feel like you constantly have to explain yourself to people. Deeply held beliefs affect nearly all of your actions, and I didn't want to feel like the people around me were questioning my every decision. I wanted a few people who understood me, who believed what I did. I wanted friends I didn't have to explain myself to. All I wanted was a handful of fellow Christian college students, who were in the same stage of life and who were guided by the same principles as I was. Every article told me this was a lot to ask for. That first church in Scotland seconded that.



There is something worrying about lacking young adults in a church or in any longstanding organization, religious or otherwise. First, because it means that eventually, the organization will die off, as is the case with Scottish Gaelic. But also, without younger viewpoints, there is often little change, even in places where it is desperately needed.

I know plenty of people in the US who have walked away from Christianity, and in most cases, it had nothing to do with theology. Their problem was not with God, but with the people who claimed to follow Him. Their problem was with Christians, who they found judgmental and hypocritical. Christians preached a message of love, yet they found rampant racism, sexism, and homophobia amongst Christians. Christians claimed to care for all people, yet they turned a blind eye to issues of inequality and poverty.

I couldn't blame them. In fact, I thought that they were right all too often. I was a Christian, and yet I often saw these issues in churches and in Christian schools and organizations. Many of my peers who grew up going to church and to private schools say the same. They see the good at the heart of Christianity, in the message of love and joy and hope that resides in the Bible, yet they also see how humans have twisted the message to suit their own biases, and all the harm that has caused. They have little patience for the hypocrisy they see, and are quick to call for change.

That is what makes young Christians so important. Teenagers, college students, and young adults tend to be highly entuned to hypocrisy. They are the ones who see most clearly what needs to change in the church and in the world, and have the power and drive to do something about it. They call out churches and peers who do not represent the word of God well.

They call out racism, sexism, and homophobia and leave churches and organizations that refuse to amend their stances. They take a stand for important issues and are the voice of change.

Without them, it was unlikely much change would happen at all. Without young eyes to see hypocrisy and other issues, organizations become blind to internal problems. These issues only compound with time and become ossified, as beliefs that are repeated over and over again become internalized to the point where they cannot be questioned. If there were no young people, there would be little change. Without any young people to question the Christian organization in Scotland, both the good and the bad aspects of Christianity would die out. The old prejudices, which twisted Biblical truth to support human biases, would die unchallenged, and there would be no one to salvage the hope that was supposed to be the heart of this whole thing.



The University of Edinburgh did have a student society called the Christian Union. I didn't know anything about the organization, but I was looking for a community of college-aged Christians, and that sounded like a good place to find one.

All I wanted was an organization where I could be a passive participant, one that led Bible studies once a week where I could show up and meet make friends who believed the same things I did. I wanted an established community that I could step into, one that would welcome me into their group as if I had always been there.

Very early on in the first meeting, it became clear that the Christian Union was not an organization for passive participants. It was an organization whose goal was to introduce non-Christian students to Christianity and to the Gospel. They hosted panels where non-Christian

students could ask questions of their Christian peers and gave talks about different issues non-Christians often had with Christianity. The club sounded like a huge commitment, one that I was not willing to make, especially since I didn't know enough about it to know whether the organization upheld my personal beliefs.

I have always had a touchy relationship with the concept of evangelism. My problem is not with sharing what you believe, but with how it is often done.

My senior year of high school, we read a novel called *The Poisonwood Bible*. It was about an American missionary family from Georgia that moves to a small, isolated village in Africa in an attempt to convert the villagers to Christianity. The father, a pastor, was sickening. He talked down to the villagers, even though he couldn't speak their language (the title of the book refers to the way he would mispronounce words in their language, garbling the message of Christianity). He refused to get to know the native peoples. Instead, he maintained a sense of haughty self-righteousness because he was certain he was in the right and they were in the wrong. The novel could be read as a critique on American Christianity and on international missionary efforts, one that I thought captured the problems with both with painful accuracy.

The pastor's refusal to even try to understand the people he was preaching to, while acting as if he was a martyr, is the problem I have with many efforts at evangelism. Too often, those who are trying to spread the Gospel—a message of hope, love, and forgiveness—actually spread a message of condemnation, threatening that if people don't convert and believe what they believe, they will be punished for eternity in the fiery depths of hell. Perhaps they mean well, and perhaps they really do believe they are doing people a favor, but they don't realize how offensive their self-righteousness is. They don't realize that they are driving people away from

Christianity, rather than bring them to it. I know, because I have been on the receiving end of this kind of evangelism.

I grew up going to a private Christian school, more for the academics than for the religious aspects. From kindergarten to sixth grade, our teachers would track our church attendance, and give awards at the end of the year to students who attended church most regularly. We also had to do a project every year where we would decorate some sort of picture that related to our school's theme for the year. One year it was fish, relating to our theme verse where Jesus invited his disciples to be "fishers of men;" another year it was puzzle pieces for "together in Christ." On each of these projects, we were required to write our names and our baptism birthdays, the day that we had been baptized. The result would be hung out in the hallway. Every year, I dreaded that project because I was one of the few students that hadn't been baptized, and the annual project publicized that for all to see. I also dreaded the award ceremony at the end of the year, because my family never went to church.

The teachers and administrators told us that baptism and church attendance were requirements for Christians, prerequisites for getting into heaven. The implication was that unbaptized, unchurched heathens like me were destined for hell—and sometimes that wasn't just an implication. You can imagine how terrifying it is for a little kid to believe that they are going to hell. I tried to be the best kid I could possibly be, steering clear of sins like lying or stealing or arguing with my parents, hoping that maybe God would offer me a little mercy.

You could ask why I chose to believe in all this. The answer was that I didn't see that I had a choice. In a place like that, the question of whether or not this God exists is not a question; it is the Truth with a capital T, unquestionable as the fact that the sky is blue. Besides, I was just a child. I believed whatever adults told me simply because they were older and knew better. It

never occurred to me that I could question what they had to say. Even if it had, I don't think I would have had the words to articulate my questions.

It took me until college to truly figure out how terribly I'd been led astray. It was then that I realized that the whole point of the Gospel was that we could not work our way into heaven, and that God loved us so much despite our sin that He sent Jesus to save us. The message I had been taught had been the complete opposite of this. The whole point of the Gospel was mercy, love, and forgiveness, not condemnation. It was then that I realized that I had spent my entire life being scared to death of a message that was supposed to bring me hope.

Having been on the receiving end of broken evangelism of the *Poisonwood Bible*, I had a complicated relationship with evangelism as a whole. Too often it is preached by self-righteous Christians who tell people they are going to hell because they don't believe what the preacher believes. They tell the non-Christians that they'd better shape up so they don't end up burning for all eternity. I knew from experience that that kind of evangelism was counterproductive at best and hope-stealing at worst.

I wasn't so cynical as to assume that every evangelical organization was like that, but I also knew better to assume the opposite. Likely the Christian Union did not commit the same mistakes as my private school had, but I didn't know it well enough to be sure, so I was hesitant to join it. Besides, I didn't think I'd have the time for being part of a ministry in Scotland, since there was so much else to do.

Chapter 23- Chance and Coincidence

Although the Christian Union was not what I was looking for, going to the meeting was not a total waste of time. I met several students there who invited me to church with them the next weekend. They told me that their church had a tight-knit group of university students, exactly what I was looking for. They were right: there were at least two dozen university students who went there, and all of them were close friends. Every Sunday, the group would go to church together in the morning, then they would go to one of their flats for lunch and tea. They would hang out there until it was time to go to the evening service, after which they had their student Bible study, which served dinner. Sundays were a marathon, and I rarely did the whole thing. Usually, I would slip out of the person's flat and go back to the dorm to Skype with my family. Sometimes I would return for the second service, but not often. Sundays were supposed to be a day of rest, yet Sundays became the most exhausting part of my week. Although I enjoyed hanging out with the group of students, I didn't love the church itself. Dedicating an entire day to going to church was exhausting; it involved much more social interaction than I could handle. I ended up switching churches a few weeks later.

The reason I stayed so long at the church, even though I wasn't sure that I liked it, was because I didn't want to leave that group of college students. They were all kind and welcoming to me from the beginning, and learned a lot about Scottish culture by spending time with them. They also asked me a lot of questions, and seemed genuinely interested in learning about who I was and where I was from.

One of the first times I went to that church, several of the students asked me if I was involved in any Christian organizations back home, and I told them I was involved in Young

Life. Young Life has always been difficult for me to explain, beyond the fact that it is a ministry that focuses on high school students. The most difficult part to explain is our main event, a weekly gathering called club. The best explanation I have ever heard was that club is like summer camp in an hour. I have often called it controlled chaos. We play ridiculous and often messy games, sing popular songs and dance around like crazy people, put on skits, and have raffles for the kids (the prize for which is often giving a leader a pie in the face, although we have been known to give out things like an old shoe, spray-painted gold). A typical Monday evening at Young Life involves a dozen kids and a dozen or so leaders singing Taylor Swift songs at the top of their lungs, having a sandwich-making contest, and a skit where leaders dress up like bananas. At the end of the insanity, one leader gets up in front of the group and gives a talk about Jesus. The goal of the ministry is to get to know kids on an individual basis as friends, make them feel comfortable, welcomed, and loved, and, eventually, share what we believe with them. In my mind, it is the opposite of the evangelism I grew up with. It prioritizes getting to know the high school students, rather than shoving a Bible at them and telling them to believe it or else. My area director once said that the goal is to make the high schoolers feel loved and valued, and for the leaders to be people the kids can count on, and if the kids happen to come to believe in Jesus because of it, that's great too.

I didn't even try to explain all this to the people I met in Scotland. I told them that it was an organization that worked with high school students, one that I adored and missed. Most of them listened politely, but blankly, making it clear that such a thing didn't exist in Edinburgh. I was getting used to their blank stares when one of the girls responded differently.

“Euan does Young Life,” she said, gesturing at one of the boys on the other side of the room. “He talks about it all the time, but I think we’ve all stopped listening. Come on, I’ll introduce you to him.”

She led me across the room to him, introduced me, and told him that I did Young Life. His eyes lit up, and I recognized in it the look of a Young Life leader absolutely in love with what they were doing. It was a look that I often saw when I looked in the mirror.

Young Life will try to tell you that there is not a “Young Life personality,” saying that anyone can become a Young Life leader, so long as they believe in Jesus and want to serve high school students. While this is true, there undeniably is a stereotypical Young Life personality. I recognized it in Euan immediately. He was outgoing and kind, easily excited, and seemingly up for anything. He was even wearing a Young Life t-shirt with a flannel shirt over it, a typical Young Life look.

I had never fit the stereotype. An introvert with social anxiety is not the kind of person you’d expect to find in a role where the job description demands for you to talk to strangers and make a fool of yourself in front of a room full of high schoolers. I hated anything that put me in uncomfortable social situations, and being a Young Life leader was all about putting leaders in uncomfortable social situations. Yet I remembered how lost, invisible, and unloved I’d felt throughout high school. Back then, I often wondered if any of my fellow students would really notice or care if I disappeared—if it wasn’t for group projects or review games or any other situation where the “smart girl” was needed, I was sure no one would.

My high school had Young Life, but I never got involved because the students who went were in the cool crowd, and I didn’t fit in. I didn’t want to spend more time outside of school

playing by the same rules of the social hierarchy that existed within the school itself. I often felt like an outcast in school; why would I put myself through that after the last bell rang?

It wasn't until I got to college that I understood what Young Life was about. My second week of freshman year at UT, I heard that Young Life was putting on an event for college students. I went because I was desperate for friends. I figured, if nothing else, people I knew from high school would be there, and I could find comfort in the familiar faces. I didn't know what to expect that night.

College Young Life is a lot like what I do now for high school students, only with slightly less chaos. The leaders there lead college freshmen, hoping to make college freshmen feel welcome at UT. I didn't know that back then. At the time, all I wanted was to become friends with somebody. Anybody. I was also looking for a Christian organization to join, and I figured I may as well start with one whose name I recognized.

When I got there, I found myself waiting outside the room before the event began, in a sea of other freshmen. Around me, other people started chatting and making friends as if it was the easiest thing in the world. None of them spoke to me. I started to feel the way I used to in high school, that I was invisible and that no one cared about me. Situations like that, where I feel out of place when everyone else seems comfortable, is a sure trigger for my social anxiety. That night, I could feel the anxiety monster looming over my shoulder, waiting to devour me. It made me want to disappear. I considered slipping away and going back to my dorm, but about that time the doors opened and the leaders inside started welcoming us in with cheers and applause. On the way in, I passed a Young Life leader who was holding open the doors. She must have seen the deer-in-the-headlights look on my face, because she stepped towards me with an understanding smile.

“It’s a little overwhelming, isn’t it?” she asked. When I nodded, she said, “I’m glad you’re here.”

I didn’t know the power of those four words, *I’m glad you’re here*, until that moment. I hadn’t realized how badly I had wanted to hear them until she said them. She didn’t even know my name.

As I stepped into the room, all my nervousness melted away, the anxiety disappearing the way a shadow does when you turn on the light. The love in that room was palpable, like the Texas humidity. I couldn’t explain it, other than that for the first time since arriving at college, I felt like I belonged. In the months after that, I learned that that was what Young Life was all about.

It was through Young Life that I started to figure out how many things I had gotten wrong about Christianity, and how backwards the message I had been taught was. I had developed an aversion to evangelism because I had been the victim of a broken message from broken people who were blind to their own brokenness. Young Life showed me that that broken way was not the only way. It valued getting to know people before trying to share the Gospel with them, not the other way around like I was used to. In Young Life, they call it “earning the right to be heard,” and it’s one of the hallmarks of Young Life’s mission. Leaders recognize that kids aren’t going to listen to them if the kids don’t trust them. High schoolers are not going to accept a message that they feel like attacks them from a person who is up on a high horse. Young Life leaders do everything they can to show kids that they’re not up on any high horse (hence the ridiculous games and skits at club), and to demonstrate to the kids that they are loved and valued for who they are, regardless of what they believe. The whole point is to show kids, and sometimes tell them, that you’re glad they’re there, even if you don’t know a thing about them. I

knew how much that had meant to me, and I wanted to pass that feeling on, to do my part to make sure high schoolers didn't feel as invisible and unloved as I once had.

It was a noble goal, but once I became a Young Life leader myself, I realized how difficult it was. It was a time-consuming role, and one that was stressful even for the leaders on my team who didn't have social anxiety like I did.

Every part of being a Young Life leader should have been triggering to me. It sometimes was. There were several times when I would be on my way to a high school football game to try to meet new kids and would seriously consider turning around. Once, I walked into a coffee shop where kids often hung out, then walked right back out again because I couldn't bear the idea of trying to force a conversation. Another time, I had a panic attack after going to a meeting at the school at lunch with a bunch of kids I didn't know. But those were rare occurrences.

One of the ways to lessen anxiety is to force yourself to do things that can trigger anxiety, to show yourself that they aren't that bad. You face your fears head on, rather than avoiding them for the rest of your life. My therapist once forced me to be late to things for a week, to help me get over my anxiety about not being on time. I hated every minute of it. At first, Young Life felt like that. I had to force myself to do things that frightened me, day after day. It helped that I had an objective behind it, rather than just a desire to conquer my anxiety, to help spur me on in moments when I would have rather turned around and gone home. I wasn't doing any of it for me; I was doing it for the high schoolers, who I loved. Conquering my anxiety wasn't the goal—when I started, I didn't even know that I had anxiety. The goal was to do the job that I had signed up for to the best of my ability. The more I did those difficult things—being silly at club and talking to random high schoolers at football games and coffee shops—the easier they became. I even began to look forward to some of those things that once terrified me so much.



After the girl introduced me to Euan, he started asking me a dozen questions about what Young Life was like back home. He then started telling me what his team was like there in Edinburgh. He said that Young Life was less than a decade old in Scotland (Young Life was founded in Texas in the 1960s), and because of that their teams weren't as big, and they didn't put on club the way we usually do in the US. Still, he was excited about what they were doing, and excited about the way Young Life had grown even in its short time in Scotland. His joy was infectious, and I soon started talking as quickly and excitedly as he was, telling him all about what Young Life was like back home.

I told him that of all the things I left behind in Austin, Young Life was the one I missed most. We had had a few rough semesters where few kids had come to club, but the semester before I left, we had suddenly had a ton of new kids come, and we couldn't account for it except as an act of God. I said that I felt like we as a team had momentum, and that I had built some good friendships with some girls at the high school where I lead, and I was sad to leave it. Also, my Young Life team, filled with other college students like me, were some of my favorite people, and I couldn't imagine not seeing them two times a week or more like usual. I couldn't imagine not having them around, or what my life would look like when it didn't revolve around Young Life.

After I had talked for a long time, Euan said, "You should come to team meeting with me in a few weeks, when we start back again, and see if you want to get involved here."

I told him I'd think about it, and we swapped contact information before I left church that day. I pretended as though I hadn't made up my mind, even to myself as I walked home. After

the Christian Union meeting, I had told myself that I didn't come all this way to get involved in another ministry. I told myself that taking a break from Young Life for a semester was a good thing; Young Life is time consuming, and I told myself that taking time away from it would give me time to process and recharge.

With the Christian Union, I hadn't felt any inclination to get involved. With Young Life, though, while part of me was hesitant to jump in, the rest of me couldn't imagine turning down this chance to get involved in the organization I loved in a country I was beginning to love just as much. I told myself I would go to team meeting, meet the team, and see what things were like over here. I figured my involvement would be minimal, since I wasn't going to be there very long.

Chapter 24- Jumping in the Deep End

The first Young Life meeting of the semester was two weeks later, on a Wednesday night, just like back home. I met Euan on the street outside the area director's house, and he led me inside to meet the team.

The area director was a man named John. He and his wife Alisa were both Americans—he was from Georgia, she was from California—and both had lived in Scotland for a decade or so. John told me that he hadn't known what Young Life was when they hired him to be on staff. Alisa, on the other hand, had been doing Young Life since she was younger than I was.

John asked me all the basic questions about why I was in Scotland and how I liked it there, along with many questions that Euan had asked me about what my Young Life team back home was like. In return, he told me about Young Life in Edinburgh. As Euan had said, Young Life hadn't been in Scotland for long—only about ten years—and it had been in Edinburgh for an even shorter amount of time than that. But he told me that they had two clubs they had started in Edinburgh for two of the schools they lead at, and at the third school, they had a dedicated group of girls who did Campaigners, which is what Young Life calls their Bible studies. Things were a lot smaller and less structured than what I was used to back in the US, John said, but he was excited about the way they had grown over the past few years, and the ways that they were hoping to grow in the future. At one of the clubs, they had started doing club talks, and they were about to start doing club talks at the other. They were also hoping to start club at the third school; they had talked to the group of high school girls they knew there, and the girls were ecstatic about the idea.

I was amazed at the amount of work this group did in Edinburgh. Back home, my team had twelve people leading at one school, and even with so many people, we all always seemed to be busy. John's team in Edinburgh had about the same number of people, but they lead at three different schools around the city. I was amazed by their dedication even before I met the rest of the team.

As John and I talked, the rest of the team filed in. They absorbed me into the group instantly, rather than treating me like the random Texan who had dropped out of the sky one day. They made me feel like a part of the little family they had built together, even though they didn't know me well.

Back home, I heard someone call my Young Life team the Island of Misfit Toys. It was difficult to be offended by that, because they were right. We were a group that didn't seem like they should fit together, a group who never would have gathered together if we weren't all placed on the same team. We all had different majors, were from different hometowns across Texas, and had different talents and interests. You wouldn't think a group like ours would be close, but we were.

The group in Edinburgh reminded me of my team back home, as they seemed like an equally mismatched group. Four of the leaders were from Northern Ireland, three were from Scotland, and one was an American whose parents were missionaries in Eastern Europe. Three of them had already graduated from university (not counting John and Alisa), and the rest were college students, spread across at least four universities in Edinburgh. Some were shy, others were more outgoing and talkative. All of them seemed to be close friends, and all of them loved Young Life.

The stories of how they each ended up in Young Life varied. A few of them from Northern Ireland, including Angus, had been involved in Young Life in high school. He told me that the first Young Life area created in the UK and Ireland region was that club in Northern Ireland that he had been involved with. The rest seemed to have ended up there by chance or coincidence. It seemed that all of them had met someone involved in Young Life, like how I had met Euan, and had come to team meeting with them, then had agreed to get involved without knowing what they were getting themselves into.

I don't think I realized how much I missed my Young Life team back home until I met the team in Edinburgh, ate dinner with them, and sat in on their meeting. I also don't think I realized how much I missed doing Young Life until I heard them talk about what they were doing there in Edinburgh.

At the end of the evening, John told me I could be as involved or uninvolved as I wanted to be in Edinburgh. He said I could help out at any of the clubs I wanted to, or I could just come and hang out with them at team meeting on Wednesday nights. I told him I wanted to help lead at club, if I could. I think he was as surprised as I was that I wanted to become that involved that quickly. I had told myself I had been on the fence about it until then. In reality, I think I had made my mind up the moment Euan invited me to team meeting.



A week or so later, I went with John and several of the others to what they called a drop-in club on Friday afternoon. They borrowed a church's space and set up pool tables, cards, and video games for the kids to play. They also served pizza, sandwiches, and sweet pastries. It was

different from the structured club I was used to—here, the kids were pretty much allowed to run wild, while the leaders would talk to them and play games with them wherever they could.

John had warned me that these kids were middle-school aged, younger than I was used to, but I felt prepared. The thing about Young Life is, though, when you think you know what you're getting yourself into, that is a sure sign that you don't have a clue.

By that time in my college career, I was used to being a Young Life leader in America. I had plenty of practice talking to high school students, and had a mental list of questions to ask when the conversation went quiet. Do they play any sports? Have they learned to drive yet? If not, are they excited to? If they're a senior, where are they thinking about going to college? What are they going to major in? Are they excited about prom? Graduation? What did they do last summer? What are they going to do next summer? The list is endless. Back home, I had gotten good at pulling from this list and starting conversations with high schoolers. In fact, I would almost say I'm better at talking to high school students than I am to other college students.

American high school students, at least.

About five minutes into club in Scotland, I realized I had no idea how to talk to thirteen-year-old British children. Absolutely none. I felt a yawning age gap between us. At club in Austin, I felt like I was hanging out with my friends. The high-schoolers weren't adults, but they were self-sufficient, so I never felt like I was babysitting them. Most of the time, it felt like I was talking to kids my age. In Edinburgh, however, I was hit with the realization that I was one of the few adults in the room, and that I was supposed to help maintain order and keep things from getting out of hand. It made me feel old and, at the same time, utterly unprepared for what I was dealing with.

It didn't help that there was also a culture gap to contend with. Many of the kids who came to club were immigrants to Scotland, so there was a vast array of background cultures to navigate. I felt a little like I was being tossed into the ocean without a life preserver, and I think my wide-eyed gaze gave me away. I have a feeling that thirteen-year-olds can smell fear.

I was the only female leader there that day and every Friday the entire time I was in Scotland. Before that first club, I had anticipated that I would stay in the background, serving food and cleaning up messes, getting the lay of the land before I jumped in. John had a different idea. He sent me out to talk to the handful of girls that showed up to the drop-in club. The vast majority of kids who showed up to the club were boys, between the ages of twelve and fifteen—usually, there were about twenty of them. But there were a few twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls who came—sometimes as few as two, sometimes as many as six. Those were the ones John sent me to talk to. I did my best, but often they didn't feel much like talking to me. Some weeks, I ended up hanging around with the guy leaders, or floating around near the group of girls in case they wanted to talk to me, or just trying to stay out of the way and clean up messes.

Over the next few Fridays at club in Scotland, I learned that the phrase “how's y'all's day going so far?” does not compute in a British mind. I also had to break up a scuffle between two boys for the first time in my life (an utterly terrifying experience). I had to remember how to navigate middle-school-age girl drama, and to keep track of which girls were refusing to talk to each other that particular week.

It was harder than I had anticipated, and I realized that I was not prepared for what I had gotten myself into. I wondered if I had made a mistake in agreeing to do this. But I knew that the team of leaders needed me. There were only a handful of leaders at that club, supplemented by two youth group leaders from nearby churches. It was a lot of work to set up, to keep the kids

from destroying the place, and to clean up afterwards. Even on days where I felt like I didn't accomplish anything, John was always appreciative of my help, so I kept coming back. I didn't want to let them down, and didn't want to abandon them when I knew that I could help.



John and the other leaders didn't know much about many of the kids that came to club on Fridays. He knew a little bit about some of them. Some went to another club they hosted on Monday nights. Some went to local churches and were involved in Sunday school there, where John knew the pastors. Others, he had learned about in bits and pieces over the year or so that he had gotten to know them.

The thing he did know was that most of them had difficult lives at home. The school they attended was in a poorer part of the city. Many of them were from families who were immigrants, and many of them moved around a lot. Most had complicated home lives, the details of which John didn't share with me. But what he did tell me was that these kids were used to having people they trusted and looked up to leave. They were slow to let people in because they had known so many people who had let them down. What they needed was people they could count on, trust, and look up to. What they needed was hope. And we Young Life leaders could give them that, John thought. I agreed. I realized that it wasn't just the leaders who needed me there. The kids did too. And I didn't want to let them down.

I wasn't there long enough to learn many of their names, but I got to know a few at least a little bit. Enough for me to get attached to them. At club, I started making some slow progress with the kids. One of the boys challenged me to a game of pool and when I won—which I did only because he scratched—one of the other boys, who was the self-proclaimed king of the pool

table, tried to rope me into their ongoing pool tournament. The girls started opening up to me a bit, coming to me with their drama and sharing a little bit of their lives with me. I witnessed some great conversations between leaders and kids about subjects ranging from problems at school to God. It wasn't much, but it was enough to make me want to come back week after week.

I kept going to club, and although I told myself I was going to help out, I really felt like I was going to learn. I felt like I was in training all over again, learning how to be a Young Life leader in this new, unfamiliar context.

What I liked most was spending time with the leaders and watching them interact with the kids. The kids were often wild, breaking rules left and right. Leaders often had to deescalate things between kids. What stunned me was how much the leaders loved the kids, and how evident that love was. They clearly enjoyed spending time with the kids and getting to know them, even the difficult ones. They laughed when the kids were bouncing off the walls, and spoke fondly of even the kids that had gotten into trouble that day. They loved the kids beyond the trouble they were getting into, loved them even when it was difficult. As they should. As Jesus did. They were a group that practiced what they preached, day in and day out.

I don't know how many of the kids got it, but I do know that the kids kept coming back week after week, like I had when I first got involved in Young Life. When we started doing club talks at the two clubs—in an interview with the leaders at the Friday club and in a more structured talk at the Monday night club—many of the kids stayed and listened, and some asked questions. It wasn't as though they were suddenly opening up to us, but it was a start.



While John invited me to every Young Life event he was involved in, the other leaders invited me along to other things they were doing as well. I soon found myself enveloped in their social circle. They invited me to church with them, to go out to pubs, and to their birthday parties. I leapt at every invitation I was given, no matter where it took me. I loved getting to spend time with each of them. The more I got to know them, the more they inspired me.

Each of the Young Life leaders had other things they were involved in, often other Christian organizations that they gave their time to. One boy was on the worship team at church, playing guitar during the songs. Several others worked with the children's ministry at their church, and another co-lead a Bible study for college students as well. Two others had leadership positions in the Christian Union. One was a church intern who months later helped organize a virtual concert to raise money for poverty, while also speaking out about sex trafficking.

All of them defied what those articles I had read said about the state of Christianity among young adults in Scotland. Not one of them was lukewarm about what they believed in; none of them were disenchanted or disengaged. All of them chose to spend much of their time involved in ministry and in bringing about positive change in the world. They pointed out the things that needed to be changed in the world and in the church, and took charge of bringing those changes about. They saw it as their duty to fix the wrongs of the world and to love others as well as they could, and they did it all joyfully. Their eyes lit up when they talked about the things that they were involved in. They had a hope and a passion that I thought would be missing from Christianity in Scotland. I felt as though I had a lot to learn from them.

Chapter 25- Open Mic Night

At the end of February, we started working on planning club for the group at the third school, where the girls had a Campaigners group. The school was a private school, one that reminded me of Chilton in *Gilmore Girls*. The students wore uniforms with jackets with the school seal on the lapel, and walked the hallways of a castle-like building. The school grounds were surrounded by a high metal fence, giving it a foreboding atmosphere. I suppose it didn't help that the one day that I consciously walked past it, I got hailed on. I wondered what the school looked like on the inside, and whether the interior looked as much like Hogwarts as the exterior did.

The group of girls were led by a Young Life leader named Megan. She and John also knew a few boys at that school, but not well. The group of students that John and Megan knew there were the equivalents of high school juniors in the US, an age that I was much more comfortable with. When John invited me to help out with them, I jumped at the chance.

Once a month or so, the Young Life team hosted an open mic night for the students at that school, although any high schoolers in Edinburgh were welcome to come. The only one they held while I was in Edinburgh was on one of the last days in February.

That evening, I went and helped John set up at the coffeeshop that was letting us use their space for the open mic night. I know nothing about music or sound equipment, so some of the time I was more in the way than I was helping.

As we were setting up, I saw a girl and her mother come in. The girl looked to be about fifteen or sixteen, and had that shy look on her face that I often had when I was her age, that look where it was clear you just wanted to disappear rather than have anyone speak to you. Her

mother prompted her to go talk to us. She approached us, standing somewhere between John and me, looking confused as to which one of us she should go up to. John didn't see her, as he was busy setting up a keyboard. I put down the cord I was trying to unravel and went up to her to introduce myself. I asked her what her name was and whether she was there for the open mic night. When she said yes, I introduced her to John. He told her that we weren't starting for another few minutes, but that he would send around a sign-up sheet in a few minutes, once more people had showed up. The girl went back to where her mother was sitting in a corner of the coffeeshop as we continued setting up.

Eventually, Megan showed up, and her girls started arriving as well, along with several of their friends. Soon, the coffeeshop was packed with at least two dozen high school students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. John put me in charge of taking the sign-up sheet around and asking the students if they wanted to perform, so that I could meet as many of them as possible. At first, there were few takers, but the sheet slowly filled up. As I went around, Megan introduced me to her group of four girls, and I also talked to several of their friends. I ended up sitting with two of Megan's girls throughout the evening, asking them about school and telling them how things were different in Edinburgh than back in Austin.

The first student to sign up to perform was the girl who had arrived first. She was from a different school from the rest of the students, one that was fairly far away from that area of Edinburgh, so she didn't mingle with the rest of the kids in the room. As shy as she seemed, I was surprised that she wanted to perform. As soon as she got behind the microphone with her guitar, though, her shyness seemed to melt away. She sang and played with an amount of talent and confidence that I envied.

After she finished, I pulled up a chair next to her table and told her that I was really impressed. I told her that I wished I could sing and play guitar like she could; I had tried to teach myself once, but it was a doomed effort from the start. I watched her eyes light up as I started asking her about how long she'd been playing and what she liked to do. She started opening up a little and talking to me more confidently, no longer seeming so shy now that someone was talking to her about the things that she was interested in. It made me smile to see her look so excited. It was the first time I had really felt like I was doing what a Young Life leader was supposed to do since arriving in Edinburgh.

I was blown away by the talent of all the kids who performed that night. You wouldn't think that sitting in a coffeeshop listening to a group of high school students play instruments and sing would be a fun way to spend a Thursday night, but it was.

Afterwards, John asked me how I thought it went. I told him I felt a lot more confident talking to that group of kids than I did with the older ones I had been working with so far.

"You looked like it," he said.

I was much less aware of the culture gap between the high schoolers and me with those older students. The age gap also seemed much less unsurmountable with them. I felt like I could relate to them, and I knew how to talk to them. They weren't as unapproachable as the younger students seemed, the ones who barely acknowledged my existence, much less talked to me. The older students, especially Megan's group of girls, asked me about my life as much as I asked about theirs, making me feel less like I was interrogating them. They seemed to enjoy talking to me as much as I enjoyed talking to them.

John told me that I was welcome to help them plan the club they were going to put on for that group of students in a few weeks. My suggestions would be helpful, he said, because they were hoping to make this club more structured, like the ones in the US, and I had experience planning clubs like that. I told him I was happy to help.

As he gave me a lift home that night, he told me about how he was hoping they could establish a club there at that school, as well as ones at the other schools around Edinburgh. He also told me that he was hoping that he would someday get to establish College Young Life at the universities around Edinburgh, like what we had at UT. Nothing like that existed anywhere in the UK, he said, but he was hoping they could make something like that happen. As I sat in the shotgun seat listening to his dreams for Young Life in Edinburgh, I started imagining what things could look like in a few years, if all these dreams came true. I imagined having club in Teviot, the student union at the University of Edinburgh. I imagined having Young Life leader training in the spring, like what I had gone through, and watching groups of university students get placed at schools around Edinburgh. I imagined what could happen if the ball started rolling. And I imagined myself being there to see it all; I imagined being part of making it happen.

The longer I was in Edinburgh, the more I felt this growing sense that I wanted to stay. I felt this growing sense of attachment to Scotland; there were places there that mattered to me, places that were Ebenezers in my memory. Scotland was a land I felt deeply tied to. But as much as I wanted to stay, or to return someday to live there permanently, I couldn't imagine what I would do there if I did. That night, I started wondering what it might be like if I started working on Young Life staff in Edinburgh, doing what John did, getting to know high school and college students and planning clubs. All of a sudden, I had a reason to come back. I knew that I would have to go back to Texas to finish college and graduate, but I had no plans for after that. So why

couldn't I move back to Scotland, permanently, to work for the organization I loved and believed in?

I let my imagination run away from me that night, and for the weeks after. I knew the dangers of getting my hopes up, because I had been disappointed in the past. But this time, I didn't see the harm in it. I paid for it later. It wasn't long after that night that things started to unravel.

Section VI: Coronavirus and the Aftermath

Chapter 26- My Return to the US

One of my biggest flaws is that I have never kept up with the news. Growing up, my family would watch the news every night at dinner, but once I started going to college, I did not stay up to date with current events. The number of possible sources and news stories to read was overwhelming, and with all my other responsibilities, I had little time to sift through it all, much less read any of it. Once, my roommate told me about the concept of analysis paralysis—of having so many options that you cannot choose one. I told her that I think I live there. I knew my habit of not paying attention to current events was not good, but I figured there were worse habits to have. Besides, I reasoned, most things that went on in the greater world were only tangentially relevant to me, if they were relevant at all. I carried the same mindset with me to Scotland. But in Scotland, I soon realized that I should be paying more attention.

In January or February, I started hearing things about this new disease called COVID-19 that had popped up somewhere in China in late 2019. As the weeks went on, it started to spread to other parts of the globe. I saw snippets of news about it on the TVs in the dining hall, but didn't think much of them, since I was busy trying to figure out life in a new country. I didn't hear much more about it than that until the COVID-19 virus, called the coronavirus, reached Italy.

By then, I started hearing things from my Young Life team and others about how people were starting to panic-buy toilet paper, leading to a shortage. They joked about it, saying that we had better stock up. No one seemed concerned that the virus would reach us. Italy wasn't as far away as China, but it still distant. Maybe that was my American viewpoint—I was used to the European Continent being an entire ocean away, rather than across the English Channel. Over

the next few weeks, I started seeing headlines about the shutdowns in Italy, and I started reading the stories.

At that point, I had no idea how serious coronavirus could be, how quickly it could spread, and how long it was before symptoms showed up. To me, it sounded like a bad cold or the flu. It didn't occur to me to be afraid of it.

Around that time, one of my Italian friends invited me to go to a ceilidh with her and one of her friends who was visiting her for the week from northern Italy. I knew that coronavirus was rampant there, and while I wasn't that worried that he'd have the virus, I decided that it was better to be safe than to be sorry. The last thing I needed was to get sick with some brand-new disease while in a faraway country. Besides, I had Young Life that night anyway.



Since I arrived in Scotland, my family had been planning to come visit me for my younger sister's spring break in mid-March. By early March, the virus had made its way to a new hotspot—London. People mentioned possible shutdowns in the UK, but even that seemed unlikely. My parents called me on Sunday, a week before they were supposed to leave for Scotland. At that point, things still seemed like they would go according to plan.

Two days later, on Tuesday, my dad called me in the middle of the day. He started the conversation by asking me how I was doing, and whether I was handling classes ok. I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was beating around the bush about something, but I couldn't tell what. Finally, he told me that they were thinking that they wouldn't come visit me in Scotland after all. They would have to fly through London to get to me, and while they weren't afraid that they'd catch the virus, they were worried about getting caught in a lockdown there. Since my

sister had to get back for school and my parents had work, they couldn't afford to get stuck there for two weeks. I told them that that sounded like a wise decision—I was beginning to worry a little about them passing through London anyway. On top of that, I was going to be busy with school that week. The professor strike, which had been going on for the past three weeks, was supposed to end and classes were set to start up again the week they would arrive. I had papers to write and a Gaelic test to study for. It was likely that I wouldn't get to spend much time with them even if they did come.

Just before I was going to hang up, my dad said, "If you get sent home early, don't worry—we'll figure out how to deal with it."

My heart started to pound. "I hadn't even thought of that happening."

Hearing the panic in my voice, my dad backtracked, seeming to regret that he had put the idea in my head. He told me that it seemed unlikely that that would happen, and if it did, it would probably be months from now. I still had plenty of time left in Scotland. I agreed. My plans for Young Life in the coming weeks and for traveling after classes ended in three weeks seemed safe. By the time we said goodbye, the idea that I might be sent home early sounded far-fetched.

I went to team meeting the next evening and told them I'd see them at club on Friday, two days later. We were set to have the first club with Megan's girls Friday night, and all of us were ablaze with excitement.

Thursday morning, I woke up to a slew of messages in a group chat of UT students studying at the University of Edinburgh. I scrolled through them idly, still half asleep, wondering what in the world was going on now. I came to a screenshot of an email someone's friend in France had gotten from UT, telling them they had to decide whether to stay in France or whether

to come back to the US, due to coronavirus. In order to stay, they had to sign a waiver. In the next few messages, the students wondered whether we'd get a similar email soon. They all agreed that if we did, they were going to stay. I thought the same.

The last message in the chain was a screenshot of another email, one that I would find in my own inbox heartbeats later. My hands were shaking and my heart was pounding so hard that I could barely read it, but even when I made out the words, telling me that I had to come home, I couldn't believe it.

"Looks like we don't get a choice about whether we get to stay," the final message in the chat said.



Part of what makes heartbreak so painful is the element of surprise. Things don't seem as devastating if you can see them coming and can brace yourself for impact. The shock of bad news is the key to breaking your heart.

I dropped my phone, feeling like the world had crumbled beneath me. It was like I had been driving down a picturesque road and hadn't seen the cliff coming until my car went over the edge. I curled up on my bed and cried.

I had always had this fear of setting my expectations too high, knowing that it was more likely than not that I would be disappointed. I had learned to subvert that by trying to keep a realistic outlook, rather than giving in to that part of me that believed in fairytales and happy endings. Most of the time, I could keep my idealism in check, to keep my imagination from getting away from me and ruining things. But in Scotland, I had completely lost my hold on the

reins of my imagination. It was like a horse on a wide open plain, free to run wherever it pleased. It seemed no matter how high my expectations were, Scotland always topped them.

That Thursday morning, the cynicism crept back in. I should have known that there was a catch to this too-good-to-be-true reality. I should have been waiting for the other shoe to drop. I should have seen this coming. But I hadn't. Instead, I had let myself get wrapped up in a dream, and look where that had gotten me.

The email said I had fifteen days to get out of the country and get back home. We were given no choice in the matter whatsoever—the email held a somewhat cryptic threat about how, if we failed to return, we would be unenrolled from UT. It had never occurred to me that the university had that much control over me.

That day was the most surreal I had ever experienced. It didn't set in how much I was losing until later. All I could process was that I had to leave, and that was enough to bring tears to my eyes. The worst of it was, all my family and my closest friends were across the ocean from me, and six hours behind. They weren't even awake to sit with me in my sadness.

I cried in bed for over an hour, then decided I ought to pull myself together enough to go to breakfast. I don't remember eating it. After that, I went back to my dorm and cried some more. Then, I figured I may as well go to class. I didn't know what else to do.



All my plans evaporated within the next twenty-four hours. There were coronavirus cases in Edinburgh now, and schools were shutting down. John made the decision to cancel our new club on Friday, the club that had seemed so certain two days before. All that planning and excitement had been for nothing. At that point, I didn't have it left in me to feel disappointed.

I finally got a hold of my parents, and my mom started looking for flights. I started emailing professors and advisers, telling them that I was having to leave. I texted my friends back home and my friends in Edinburgh about what had happened. I started making plans to say goodbye.

I hiked a lot on Arthur's Seat in the next few days to clear my head. Whenever I had hiked on the hill before, looking down at the city always made my problems seem small. But this particular one never seemed to get smaller, no matter how far I climbed. It almost made me cry every time I looked out at Edinburgh's skyline, thinking about all the Ebenezers I had built there. It felt like my city, even though it was never really mine.

Slowly, the reality of all the things I wasn't going to get to do started to set in. I wasn't going to get to travel to Skye and watch the waves beat against the coast. I wasn't going to get to visit North Berwick and walk on the beach. I wasn't going to get to go to Fort William or Glencoe, or see Ben Nevis. I wasn't going to get to hike in the Highlands any more. I wasn't going to get to visit a single whisky distillery with my dad. I wasn't going to get to introduce my family to all my new friends, or show them around the places I had discovered. I wasn't going to get to have my friends visit and explore Scotland with me.

I told John and the rest of my Young Life team that I had to go home, and they all sent me heartfelt messages, telling me that they were sorry to see me go so soon. They all told me that I was welcome to come back anytime. I told them that I hoped I would get to see them again soon, and that I would stay in touch.

By Friday, I had a plan. My mom had booked a flight for my dad to come in on Sunday to help me pack up my things, and we would fly back to Austin together on Tuesday. We figured

it was better for me to try to leave as soon as possible, as flights would be harder and harder to snag as things got worse.

Friday night at dinner, I got another message in the group chat about how President Trump was enacting a new travel ban. He had already enacted similar bans on China and all of Europe, save for the UK and Ireland. That day, though, he was extending the ban to include the UK and Ireland, effective Monday. I muttered a curse word aloud, something I hardly ever do. Frantically, I started searching the news for details on what this meant for me. Since the announcement was so new, it was impossible to say. It sounded like the flights from the UK would be routed to specific airports in the US, where we would be screened for COVID symptoms. Austin's airport would likely not make the list. I messaged my mom about it, asking her what we were going to do. She told me not to worry—that she would figure it out. I went back to my dorm and talked on the phone with one of my friends back home for several hours, before going to bed around 11:30pm.

At 11:50pm, my phone rang. It was my mom. Sleepily, I answered. I don't think she even said hello.

“Can you get on a flight at 8am tomorrow morning?” she asked, her voice filled with more anxiety than I had ever heard.

Before that moment, I didn't know I could go from almost asleep to wide awake and panicking in the span of a heartbeat. I don't remember scrambling out of bed or turning on the light, but suddenly I was on my feet in the blinding fluorescence. I looked around at my room, at my three half-packed suitcases, as the anxiety monster grabbed me by the throat. “I guess.”

I thought back to learning to drive, when my dad would ask me what I would do if this or that unexpected thing happened. My half-joking answer was always “panic, probably.” Here was a disaster that had no precedent, that I hadn’t thought to plan for, and that I had no idea how to fix. I didn’t know what the right answer was. And I was indeed panicking.

As I scrambled to fling things into suitcases, my mom filled me in, haltingly, on what was going on. She was currently on the phone with the airline, trying to book me and my dad an earlier flight back so we could avoid the travel ban. The only flight she could find was the one at 8am the next day, for me alone. Could I do it?

It wasn’t just a question of whether I could pack in the 8 hours that I had before the flight took off. I had never flown by myself before, even on a domestic flight. Airports are full of triggers for my social anxiety: crowds of stressed strangers, agents on the lookout for any abnormal behavior, small spaces packed with people, plenty of chances to get lost. One wrong move and the authorities might think you’re doing something suspicious and take you into custody. One wrong turn and you might end up on a plane headed in the opposite direction of where you’re meant to go. I knew my fears weren’t rational, but that didn’t make them any less real. I always made sure to travel with someone, whether it was my family or a friend, so that I had someone to bail me out. I needed that moral support to keep the anxiety monster at bay.

Flying alone had been the one anxiety-inducing thing that I had refused to tackle alone while in Scotland, which was why I had brought my mom along with me those first few days, and why the plan from the beginning had been for my dad to come get me when my semester abroad was over. Everything else I felt like I could handle. Eat in a restaurant alone? Fine. Stay in a hotel by myself? Easy. Go hiking alone? No problem. But flying alone? That was where I drew the line, because even on a normal day, I knew how anxious that situation made me.

But here I was preparing to fly alone across the Atlantic in the midst of a pandemic. It felt like a cruel joke. Baptism by fire, my mom would say. Could I handle it?

The other problem was that my dad was currently at the Austin airport on his way to come get me, already through security and waiting to get on the flight to London. I had to decide in the next few minutes before he got on the plane.

In a few moments, my mom was on the phone with me, the airline, and my dad all at the same time, juggling her phone, my sister's, and our landline to manage it. Three conversations were happening at once, all hinging on whether or not I thought I could handle flying back alone. I didn't know what to do, but I only had moments to decide.

My dad, not knowing I could hear him, said we should go with the original plan and figure things out from there. Getting back to the US would be a hellacious mess on the other side, my mom said. My dad replied that was better than waking me up and freaking me out. He hadn't meant to slight me, but his words rubbed up against my newfound independence in Scotland. I had let go of a lot in the past few days, but I was holding onto that with both hands.

"Book the 8am flight," I cut in. "I can do it."

My mom scheduled the flight with the airline, and my dad went to get his bags back before the plane took off for London. Meanwhile, my mom apologized profusely to me as I stuffed my things into suitcases.

"Stop saying you're sorry," I told her. "It's not helping, and it's not your fault."

Because my mom had taken back two of the suitcases that we used to bring my stuff to Scotland, I had to pack all of my things into half of the space. My mom told me to jettison

anything that I didn't have to bring home with me. Toiletries, towels, food. Anything that was replaceable. Anything that I wasn't emotionally attached to. Anything I didn't need. I had to leave my water bottle behind because it was too big. I also left behind one of my books (it wasn't any good, anyway), and tossed out my planner, which I regretted later. I shoved all of my clothes, the rest of my books, and all of my notes from class into the suitcases. Under different circumstances, it would have been comical.

I didn't have time to think about all the people that I wouldn't get to say goodbye to. All I could think about was everything I had to do before the plane took off at 8am the next morning, and all that the next day would entail. The idea of flying alone made me want to throw up, or curl up and cry, but I didn't have time for either of those things.

By the time I packed, showered (until my mom called, I had been planning to shower the next morning), and got settled for bed again, it was after 1am. To make it to the airport on time to catch my flight, I had to get up at 4am. Needless to say, I didn't sleep well. Really, I didn't sleep at all.

A few hours later, I was up again, doing what my mom called the paranoia check, like we always did before we went on a trip. I opened every drawer and cabinet in my room, double- and triple-checking that they were empty and that I had packed everything. The anxiety monster was seated on top of my suitcases, watching me with a smirk, tail swishing idly like a cat's, waiting for an opportunity to jump me. I checked to make sure I had my passport and that everything I would need on the flights would be easily accessible. I got rid of the last few things that couldn't fit into my bags, and then dragged my over-weight suitcases out into the hallway, locking my dorm-room door behind me one final time. I put my key in an envelope and dropped it through the office's mail slot, then went outside and called a cab.

The taxi driver arrived minutes after I called. He helped me lug my suitcases into the back of the taxi, grunting with the effort, then turned to me with a grin.

“What, have you got bodies in there?” he asked teasingly, “You must have started bringing them down early this morning!”

“It’s been a busy day,” I agreed.

On the way to the airport, he asked me where I was headed. I told him that I was studying abroad there in Edinburgh, and that my home university was making me go back to the States. I was too numb with exhaustion, both physical and emotional, to get upset about it.

We arrived at the airport as the sun was thinking about poking its head above the horizon. The taxi driver helped me unload my bags and I paid him, trying not to think about the fact that his was one of the last Scottish accents I would hear in a long, long time. I had too much else to worry about.

I dragged my bags inside and found my way to the airline desk. I checked my bags—they were both, indeed, well over the weight limit—and paid the fee, then made my way over to security.

If I had to pick one thing that caused me the most anxiety while flying, it wouldn’t be the crowds, or the stress of missing my plane, or even the miniscule possibility that the plane might crash. It would be airport security. I get anxious anytime there is even a remote chance I might get into trouble, even if I’m doing nothing wrong. Airport security scares me because I am afraid that I will act anxious and do something strange that will cause them to flag me as suspicious. Even when I know I have nothing even remotely illegal in my bags, I am always afraid they’ll find some reason to pull me out of line and put me into custody. I know that the fear is

irrational—as a young, blonde, white girl, I have the privilege of not being labeled as a threat—but that doesn't help me shake it. The idea that I would have to go through that alone, with no one I knew around to vouch for my upstanding character, terrified me.

That morning, I was so ready for a catastrophe—another catastrophe—that I was shocked when I made it through easily. I left security and went to find my gate.

I sat down by a window and started messaging everyone I knew. I told my mom that I had made it to the airport, and told my friends in Edinburgh that my plans had changed and that I was having to leave sooner than expected, and that I wouldn't get to see them again to say goodbye.

Looking back, I don't know how I handled sitting there so emotionlessly. It was as though all the emotions I had had to contend with over the past few days had made me short-circuit, so that I couldn't feel any of it anymore. I should have been falling apart by then, but I felt a strange sense of calm. It was as if I had forgotten to bring the anxiety monster along as I left for the airport, and instead had locked it up in my dorm room, to which I no longer had a key.

As I sat there in the waiting area, I happened to glance out the window. A rainbow had broken out of the clouds, like a promise that everything was going to be alright. I had seen more rainbows in Scotland than I ever had—I knew it was due to Scotland's wet climate, but part of me wanted to believe it was proof that Scotland was a magical place. It seemed fitting that a rainbow was the last thing I'd see there.



My memories of the next few hours are foggy at best, through a combination of sleep deprivation, stress, and time. I flew from Edinburgh to London, then from London to North Carolina, having to go through airport security at every stop. In London, I got picked for a random search, and they swabbed my boot and sent the sample through some machine. On a normal day, that would have caused an anxiety attack, but at that point, I was so overloaded with stress that I felt oddly invincible, unshakeable. They waved me through in a few minutes, and I went on.

On the flight across the Atlantic, I was jarred by how many American accents I heard in such a small space. It had been months since I had heard more than a handful in one place. After hearing so many other accents for months, their American ones sounded foreign and strange, even though they all sounded like me. All of the Americans on the flight were fleeing the virus, trying to dodge the travel ban like I was. It felt like we were part of a mass exodus, like the Jews fleeing Egypt. It was a story we would all tell our children and grandchildren one day.

I don't remember now how I felt when we landed on American soil. Perhaps I was relieved to be so close to home, or maybe I felt sad that my adventure was truly over. It is likely that I just felt numb.

The line at customs was long, but not as long as I had feared. It was a blessing, I decided, that my mom had snagged me a flight to Charlotte, North Carolina, rather than somewhere huge like JFK. The officer asked me a few questions, but waved me through quickly. I had figured that they would take my temperature at some point, or ask me if I had symptoms of coronavirus, but they did not. All they did was make us fill out a little form, which we handed in before they herded us along.

By the time I made it to the waiting area for my last flight, I could barely stay upright in my seat, and could barely keep my eyes open. I was halfway afraid that someone would mistake my exhaustion for symptoms of coronavirus, so I tried to stay as steady and as healthy-looking as I could in my sleep-deprived state. It was a difficult proposition, but I managed.

I realized, at this point, that it was my dad's birthday. What a way to spend it, I thought, worrying about his daughter as she flew alone across an ocean for the first time in her life, fleeing a virus that was overtaking the globe. I doubted that either of us would ever forget it.

They let us onto the plane and I sat down, shaken by how Texan everyone looked and sounded. A group of Texas A&M students sat a few rows down from me, wearing frat t-shirts with Greek letters I have never been able to decipher. Another girl wore a Vineyard Vines t-shirt. A man a few rows down wore cowboy boots and a hat, and spoke on the phone with an undeniable Texas twang. Distantly, I wondered if that was how I had looked when I arrived in Scotland, if my Texan-ness stood out as glaringly to the Scots as that of my fellow passengers did to me then. I wondered if I still looked that way, or if some of my Texan-ness had rubbed off while I was in Scotland. I wondered if I had picked up a little Scottishness along the way, and if the people around me could tell there was something different about me because of my time abroad.

A middle-aged woman sat down beside me, and pulled a Clorox wipe out of her purse, wiping down her tray table and the arms of her chair.

“You’ve probably already done this,” she said as she wiped down the arm between us, “But I’m going to do it again.”

Truthfully, it hadn't occurred to me to do that, and even if it had, I had nothing to wipe it all down with. Picking up Clorox wipes had not been on my agenda. I almost made the snide remark that if I was going to catch the virus on this trip, I probably already got it in London, but I caught myself, realizing that that was a good way to get thrown off the plane. I was tired, but not too tired to imagine myself being thrown into a cell somewhere to be quarantined, and having to call my parents to drive to North Carolina to come get me.

The woman asked me if Austin was home for me. I said yes, and she said it was for her too. It was clear that she wanted to chat, but it was equally clear that I was too exhausted for it. I thought about telling her about studying abroad and having to fly home two and half months earlier than I expected, but I couldn't put all of it into words.

I drifted somewhere between sleeping and wakefulness for the entire flight, unable to get comfortable. I don't know how long the flight was, but it felt like an eternity. At that point, I was too tired to care about everything that was happening. I just wanted to go home.

By the time we hit the ground in Austin, I had been awake for over 44 hours. I had no cell service and no Wi-Fi, so I couldn't contact my parents. I got off the plane and walked through the nearly deserted airport in the dead of night to the baggage claim. Luckily, my family was already there waiting for me. I was too wrung out to even cry when I reached them.

Chapter 27- Reverse Culture Shock and the Pandemic World

Pandemics are not the sort of thing one expects to have to deal with. What to do if a pandemic struck was not in the “All the Things That Could Go Wrong Abroad” presentation at the pre-departure orientation I attended before leaving Texas. For me, the likelihood of a pandemic seemed to fall somewhere between meeting a prince and being recruited as a spy by a foreign nation. Given that the royals’ social circles have never overlapped with mine and that I am a horrific liar, neither of these things seemed likely. It never occurred to me to worry about a pandemic. I thought we were well past the point in history where plagues were a common occurrence.

When I returned home from Scotland, I was required to go into quarantine for fourteen days. I expected that after my fourteen days in isolation, my life in the States would go back to normal. I was planning on having coffee with my friends as soon as I was set free, so I could tell them all about my whirlwind adventure.

In the end, that fourteen days at home stretched into nearly a year of barely leaving the house. And even when I did leave, the outside world was not the same as I remembered. Instead, it felt like something out of a dystopian novel. People were fleeing the cities as the virus took hold, and the death toll climbed to hundreds of thousands. The government recommended wearing masks whenever you left the house and staying at least six feet away from anyone who did not live in your household. Cities and states shut down businesses, limiting the capacity of restaurants to as low as 25%. Hospitals around the country were filled beyond their capacity, and doctors were running out of masks, gloves, and other protective equipment to be able to treat COVID positive patients safely. Scientists were scrambling to figure out treatments and vaccines. None of it felt real.



You never realize how quickly things can unravel until they do. There are certain routine practices that you build your life around: going to class and sitting in a room full of students, going to church and singing alongside the rest of the congregation, going to the grocery store, going to coffee or to lunch with a friend. You take these things for granted, thinking that they are made of stone. Then things go wrong, and you realize that they weren't stone but a magic carpet holding your life aloft. A thread snags, and the whole thing starts to come undone.

Precautions against contracting COVID-19 have changed our entire way of life. Nothing is the way that it was before. Little things that were once considered mundane now cause worry, if not fear.

Now, classes have been online since March, meaning that I haven't had a class in a classroom in a year, and will never take another in-person class for the rest of college. Church, too, has been reduced to a YouTube video on my laptop. Going to the grocery store requires a mask and a germaphobe's vigilance with handwashing when you return home. Coffee or lunch with friends seem precarious, especially indoors where the air doesn't circulate as well as it does outside. And even if you do sit outside, eating or drinking requires removing your mask. Every little action requires a complicated cost-benefit analysis.

These days, we live at a level of reclusiveness that would have been unimaginable before all this occurred. Even the most social person has to stay at home. Standing within six feet of another person seems reckless. Touching another person—shaking hands with your boss, hugging your friends, brushing hands with the barista at Starbucks as she hands you your coffee—is unfathomable.

Before modern medicine, lepers were outcasts of society because they were thought to be extremely contagious. In the New Testament, for example, lepers were not allowed to gather in crowds and they were not allowed to go into the temple because they were considered unclean. One could not touch a leper, for fear that it would make them unclean. “To receive the diagnosis of leprosy was to be cast out of society, and most never came back” Solnit says in one of her memoirs where she mentions the disease (*The Faraway Nearby* 104). This took an emotional toll on the lepers; they were isolated and untouchable. In the world of coronavirus, it is not difficult to relate to that feeling. All of us treat others like lepers, and receive the same treatment in return.

When I was in Scotland, I went to a ceilidh at a bar one night with a group of friends. The bar was packed that night, the dancefloor so filled with people that there was barely room to dance. I lost count of how many times I was bumped into or had a foot stepped on. While some of the dances required a single partner, many involved being passed around from person to person, linking arms and spinning with strangers whose lives you would never cross again.

Before Scotland, a ceilidh would have made me anxious, with so many people in such a small space. That evening, I was shocked by how little it fazed me. I found that I liked the crowds and the chaos and the noise.

A situation like that is unthinkable now. What once seemed like a fun night now seems fraught. In the world of the pandemic, being that close to that many people—breathing on you, bumping into you, holding your hands—would be a death trap. I can only imagine what would have happened if the coronavirus had spread to Scotland a few weeks sooner than it did, and if someone there had had it. Dozens of people would have caught it. The idea is chilling.

I have realized that because of the pandemic, everyone is experiencing something like the social anxiety I have lived with my entire life. They have to think hard about every social interaction, weighing the benefits of socialization against the risk of catching the virus. These worries are worse for those of us who have anxiety, but now everyone has cause to worry about every interaction they have. The anxiety monster prowls much more widely than it used to, with many more, new victims in his sights.

I often worry that this pandemic has undone all of the hard work that I have done over the past few years to overcome the anxiety monster. I felt so calm in Scotland—so free from anxiety. Now, I grapple with it every day. I feel like I am paying the price for those two and a half months of peace in Scotland. Now, the idea of going to the grocery store makes me anxious again, but for different reasons than before.

In some ways, I still feel less anxious than I used to. Talking to strangers and talking on the phone don't faze me as much as they used to. But crowds worry me again. I wonder how long it will take before I get over that fear, before I finally feel comfortable when surrounded by a large group of people again.



In Scotland, I felt as though I had the freedom to go anywhere I wanted, anytime I wanted. At any moment, I could buy a ticket and jump on a train to some corner of the world I had never explored before. Nearly all of my trips—to Inverness, Stirling, and Perth—were spur of the moment. I was answerable to no one, and there was nothing to stop me. My friends and I had even talked about visiting Venice or Vienna or Berlin together over spring break, hopping on a plane and jumping over to the Continent for a few weeks, to a land where we didn't speak the

language. It was baffling that such a thing was possible. I wasn't sure we'd actually do it, but it was thrilling to think that we could. I was aware that I was fortunate to be able to study abroad, and to have all these opportunities available to me. But I didn't realize just how lucky I was until I came home.

When I got back to the US, I couldn't leave the house to go get coffee with a friend at a coffeeshop we had been visiting together since high school. All the freedom I had known in Scotland, all the independence, had evaporated in a matter of moments.



Once we were back home, my study abroad adviser sent us an article about reverse culture shock, explaining what it was and why it happened. In effect, it is a sense of disenchantment with your home culture after having been abroad for a length of time. You feel like you can't relate to the people at home because they haven't experienced what you did, and it feels like nobody wants to hear about your time abroad, when that is all you want to talk about all the time ("Dealing"). You are struck by the differences between what we do here and what people did in your foreign home, and you start to think maybe the foreign way was better.

I didn't experience culture shock when I arrived in Scotland. The first few days were a little rough, but I adjusted quickly. I don't remember being jarred by how different things were in Edinburgh than they were back home. I noticed the differences, but I didn't feel like a fish who had been adjusted to a new tank too quickly.

Coming back was another story. I felt the reverse culture shock as soon as I got on a plane back to the US, surrounded by American accents. The plane back to Texas was even worse. I was painfully aware that I was not in Scotland anymore.

It reminded me of the movie version of the *Wizard of Oz*, where Dorothy wakes up and realizes her adventures in Oz were just a dream. When I arrived in Texas, I felt as though my time in Scotland had been a dream, not a real experience. My trip didn't involve any green-faced evil witches or stolen ruby slippers, but there was always something about Scotland that didn't feel quite real. Maybe that was just my imagination, spurred on by Scott's novels and Macpherson's Ossian poems. Even if it was a dream, I felt like my time in Scotland had changed me, the way Dorothy's dream of Oz changed her. I wouldn't have been able to go back to the way things were before, even if returning to normal had been an option.

I might have had reverse culture shock even if it wasn't for the pandemic, but I suspect it wouldn't have been as bad. Perhaps I would have felt a little out of place for a little while, and I would have missed Scotland, but I would have been content seeing my friends at home again and telling them all my stories from abroad. As it was, the world I had returned to was unrecognizable. It was as though I hadn't returned at all, but instead had fallen through a wormhole into an alternate, dystopian reality.

How do you adjust to a reality like that, one that doesn't even seem real? How do you go from being able to go anywhere you want, whenever you want, to not being able to leave your house? How do you process that?

Saying that I feel homesick for Scotland doesn't make sense, because it was never really my home. I knew from the beginning that my stay there was temporary, and that I had no claim on the place I was living. I'd built Ebenezers there, but even so, Scotland wasn't mine; I was living there, but it was not a place that I had any reason to say that I belonged to. But I felt homesick for it nonetheless. In many ways, I still do. Part of it, I think, has to do with how comfortable I felt there. Part of it is probably a lack of closure, a sense that there were things I

wanted to do there that were left undone. But part of it is likely a desire to return to the world before coronavirus. I never had to go into quarantine in Scotland like I did here. In Scotland, the coronavirus didn't feel like a threat to me; it didn't seem like something I could catch and pass on to others. That is what I want to go back to, that sense of freedom and lack of worry. That feeling that I was invincible and that there was nothing I couldn't handle on my own.

Traveling alone and living abroad alone makes you feel fearless, free, and boundlessly capable. The pandemic makes you feel the opposite. It strips you of your independence, your fearlessness, and your freedom. It reduces your world to a few rooms, with a dangerous world lurking outside the door.

Chapter 28- The Threat to Travel

Over the summer after my return, my younger sister and I got into a long conversation about how history is taught, and how teachers in the future will teach their students about the COVID-19 pandemic. I wondered if it would be like how they teach about 9/11. My sister and I had never learned about the events leading up to 9/11 in a history class before, so we didn't know all the details of how it happened. We knew the gist, of course, but we couldn't trace the events leading up to it with any certainty. No one had ever thought to teach us, because the generations in charge of teaching us didn't think of 9/11 as history. It was still too recent, too relevant, and too raw to be taught to children. They seemed oblivious to our ignorance on the subject, since they were so painfully aware that we were living in a post-9/11 world. But the post-9/11 world was all we had ever known. I was two years old, going on three, when the Twin Towers fell, and my sister wouldn't be born until two years after. We had no concept of the before, because all we knew was the after.

My art teacher in high school once mentioned how sad it was to her that her students had never known the ease of travel before 9/11. There weren't massive lines for security checks, and you didn't have to take off your shoes. Now, that is not the case. It is not hard to pick out a movie that was filmed before 9/11 if they have an airport scene in them.

It's was crazy to think that there are kids who will grow up without any memory of the pre-coronavirus world. COVID-19 is our 9/11, or our Pearl Harbor. It is the tragedy in our lifetimes that would be the measuring stick for all later tragedies. Our world will never be the same afterwards. And there will be children who will never know the world before.



In the midst of the pandemic, it is not hard to see how the world has changed. Masks are now accessories you cannot leave the house without, ones that could save your life. There are plastic barriers between you and the cashier at the grocery store and at every coffee shop. Shaking hands, once considered the polite way to greet someone, now requires second thought. And that is just in the everyday. Many people I know have speculated whether there will ever be concerts again, or whether airplane travel will ever be the same. Right now, things are so different from what they used to be that it raises the question about how much things will go back to “normal” once the pandemic is over.

My dad once told me a story about traveling right after 9/11. He, my mom, and I were scheduled to go on a cruise a few weeks after the Towers fell. We were supposed to fly to Miami to get on the boat. Instead, they chose to drive. The story was supposed to be a humorous anecdote about going on a sixteen-plus-hour road trip with a toddler (apparently, we had a pitstop at Home Depot early in the trip, and after that, whenever I saw a square, orange Home Depot sign, I insisted that we stop), but it told me something about the state of the world when that trip happened, and about a fear my parents had never admitted to before.

I can't help but wonder what travel will be like once the pandemic is over, once everyone is vaccinated and we don't have to live in constant worry of catching the virus. Right now, airplanes sound like death canisters, metal cylinders of contaminated air full of potentially contagious people who could sneeze on you at any moment. Many airlines have chosen to block off the center seat to put more space between passengers. Even so, I cannot imagine getting on a plane right now. I wonder how long it will be before I decide that flying is preferable to a very long drive.

But it isn't just the getting-there part of travel that will change. What will things be like when you do get there? How will public spaces—like restaurants, hotels, museums, parks, and beaches—change? What will go back to the way it once was, and what will be changed forever?

I often think about returning to Scotland (working on this thesis, it's been hard not to). I imagine it exactly the way it was when I left, but I don't know that that will be the case. I wonder if some of those things will ever be the same again. Having a meal and a pint in a pub, for instance. Watching a rugby game in a crowded bar, or going to a ceilidh, or going to visit a castle. I think about how much human contact those things involved, about the people in an enclosed space surrounded by surfaces that were touched dozens if not hundreds of times a day. If I returned to Scotland, would it be the same? I hope so, but I worry that it won't be.



Travel is generally not an isolating event. Even if you travel alone, as I did often in Scotland, you visit places where others have been, pass people on the streets, and interact with people in the restaurants and museums you visit. You cannot travel without going out. You cannot experience a new city and a new culture if you cannot leave your house. At that point, all you can do is read books about the place, or watch a few documentaries, but no one would ever count that as traveling.

I don't imagine that travel will disappear completely. It seems absurd to think that in a world as connected as this one that we will never need to travel long distances again. But I don't think it will be the same. How things will change is anyone's guess. I suppose it depends on how cautious we will be after this is over, and how likely we think it is that this would ever happen again. No matter what, I don't think it will be as easy as it was before.



If travel changes, and everyday life changes, it seems that travel memoirs must change as well. There will be limits to what is possible, and therefore limits on the adventures we can have and the stories we can tell.

The reason people like travel memoirs is because they are exciting. They often tell a story about a place most readers will never visit, where the author does things that the reader will probably never get to do. We like to live vicariously through their adventures, to imagine ourselves in those same places, seeing and doing those same things. Travel memoirs seem to suggest that it is possible, at least hypothetically. They encourage being brave, taking risks, and going outside of our comfort zones. They encourage us to seek our own adventures and to try traveling for ourselves.

With the pandemic, we have realized just how many risks we used to take in our day-to-day life: shaking hands, not wearing a mask, sharing food and drinks with people. Now, our past lives seem reckless. Traveling, which once seemed minimally risky, now seems like a daredevil maneuver. There isn't much of a story if you have to isolate yourself from everyone, if you cannot meet anyone new because you might catch a virus from them. There isn't much of a story if the biggest risk you can take is leaving your house.

Chapter 29- The Past and the Future is Ours

A few weeks before Christmas, I was sitting around the table with my family, playing a game of Skip-Bo, a card game we have played together for as long as I can remember. Since I got back from Scotland, in the world of the pandemic, I have spent more time at home with my family than I expected that I would. That has been a blessing, because I don't know when I will be able to spend that much time with them in the future.

In a few months, I will be graduating college and my younger sister will be graduating high school. Neither of us know where we will end up after that, but it seems likely that we will go our separate ways. As a result, we are trying to make the most of this time that we've got here before we leave. We have gotten closer in the past year or so than we ever have been, so while I'm excited for the next stage of both of our lives, I am not looking forward to seeing less of her. I feel the same with my parents. Once I graduate, I am not sure that I will stay in Austin, so I don't know how much I will see of them, either.

As we were sitting there, someone mentioned Scotland. They pointed out that around that time the previous year, I was preparing to leave for Edinburgh, unsure whether I would be able to make it by myself in a foreign country. I had no idea how things were going to play out back then. As we sat playing cards, my mom said something about how I had to be rescued from the pandemic.

"No," my dad said, with pride in his voice, "she rescued herself."

It has always surprised me how much can change in a year. If the coronavirus has taught me anything, it's that things can change much faster than that. Even though I was only in Scotland for two and a half months, I feel as though I was a completely different person before I

left than I was when I returned. The longer I've thought about Scotland, the more I've realized how much I have changed.

In the months since I returned, I have told the story of coming back from Scotland more times that I can count. At first, I told it with a note of bitterness, covered with a disbelieving laugh. Gradually, the bitterness has subsided, and now, I can laugh at the inherent craziness of it. I once heard someone say that comedy is tragedy plus time. Now, enough time has passed that what once broke my heart now makes me smile.

It seems that time is a key ingredient in a lot of things. It took time for me to realize that having to return so much earlier than I expected was not an infringement on my independence, but an opportunity to demonstrate it. Before I went to Scotland, I had been looking for a way to prove that I could take care of myself, to prove that I could overcome my social anxiety and exist comfortably in any situation. What better way to do that than to travel home by yourself in the midst of a pandemic? Once I did that, I felt like I could handle anything the world could throw at me. I never think of myself as a particularly brave person (I am the kind of person who hides under a blanket during a horror movie), but the story of my return makes me realize that I am more courageous than I thought.



Oddly, after coming back from Scotland I feel like I belong in Austin more than I once did. I think the combination of being away in Scotland and being cooped up during the pandemic has made me miss my home city. I miss being able to go to all the places I used to go to and experiencing Austin the way I did before. I used to take it for granted, like I did with so many things before the pandemic hit. I don't anymore.

At the same time, I have learned not to let my bad memories of a place color the way I view it. Places that I thought of as anti-Ebenezers, which once felt irredeemable to me, don't seem that way anymore. Scotland, with its layers upon layers of history, has taught me that memories, while important, are stackable. Not all of them are going to be pleasant, but that doesn't mean that the bad have to ruin the good. It all depends on what you choose to focus on.

Scotland has also given me a greater appreciation for the land I live on. It has made me wonder about the people who came before me, especially the Native Americans who had this land taken from them. It makes me wonder about what places they viewed as sacred, the places that they told legends about. It makes me wonder about the Ebenezers they built here that we tore down. It makes me wonder what stories they have to tell, and what we could learn from them.

I wonder about the Native Americans all over this country, who have had their culture stripped and their land stolen from them, all in the name of civilization, the way that the Gaels did. What has been lost forever, and what can still be saved? Can we save their languages? Their stories? Their memories? I don't know. Perhaps someday I will try to find out.

I also wonder about my own family, the ancestors that I never got to meet. The Scots put so much emphasis on genealogy. Many seem to know so much more about their ancestors that I do about mine. Now, I wonder what it was like when my predecessors came to the US, and when they moved from one city to another. I wonder what made them leave, and what made them stay. I wonder how long it took for them to make a life for themselves in a new place and feel like they belonged. I wonder what traditions and stories they carried with them. Much of that, I will likely never know. Perhaps I can research some, but a lot of it will be left up to my imagination, perhaps filled in by pictures and any documents I find about them. I don't know that I will take the time to search for all that information; right now, I am content just to imagine.



Coronavirus, Scottish Gaelic, and the situation of Christianity in Scotland have made me realize how many things I used to take for granted, and have made me much more grateful for what I have. They have taught me how tenuous your hold on things can be, and how easily things can slip from your hands.

While I was in Scotland, learning about the decline of Scottish Gaelic and of Christianity in Scotland, as well as about Scotland's struggle for independence, I thought a lot about loss. In a certain light, many Scots are a downtrodden people. Their language is dying, many have no faith, and their national identity is confusing at best. What I noticed most, though, was not how pitiable they are, but how hopeful. The ones who believe—be it in the resurgence of Scottish Gaelic, Christianity, or Scottish independence—believe fervently.

Months ago, I hiked on Calton Hill in Edinburgh and came across a monument for the formation of Scotland's Parliament with an excerpt from Hugh MacDiarmid poem called "Gairmscoile" on it. It said "For we ha'e faith in Scotland's hidden poo'ers/The present's theirs, but a' the past and the future's oors." In English this translates to, "for we have faith in Scotland's hidden powers/ the present's theirs, but the past and the future's ours."

When I read that poem, I had a eureka moment. *That's it*, I thought. The poem summed up everything I had seen about how the Scots regarded Gaelic, Christianity, and independence. It captured that sense of resilience and that underdog mentality that is often attributed to the Scots. More than that, though, it seemed to capture a sense of hope.

I learned a lot about hope during my time in Scotland, from those people who held on tight to a belief that others doubted. They believed that no matter the situation, there was always

chance at a better future, a future they could have a hand in creating. They weren't going to let the problems of the present hold them down. My Young Life team especially taught me a lot about hope, persevering when things are hard, and staying positive even in the midst of difficulty. They faced an uphill battle, day in and day out, yet they played as though the field was level, never once complaining about the climb. To me, that's what faith looks like. And faith requires lots and lots of hope.

The lessons I learned in Scotland about hope have helped me get through the coronavirus pandemic. There have been a lot of times when I had little hope, like I was barely keeping my head above the water. There were a lot of times when I felt angry about the way things were, angry that we all had to go through this, angry that we all had plans and dreams disrupted. There were times when I would throw myself completely into schoolwork because I didn't know what else to do to get through this. But there were other times when I felt hope. Times when I felt like I had been given a lot to be thankful for, despite all the things that had been taken from me. Time with my family, for example. The chance to join in on Zoom meetings with my Young Life team in Edinburgh, even months after I had left. Time with my Young Life team and my Young Life kids here, on a more individual basis. In those times, I didn't feel like all was lost, or that things would never be the same.

I have been more guilty than most of saying things like "the pandemic will be over by then." In March, I was convinced it would be over by the summer. In the summer, I was sure it would be over by Thanksgiving. Now, in the spring, I am sure it will be over by this coming summer. The fact that I have been wrong every single time before doesn't make me any less sure than I was before. Perhaps I have more in common with the Scottish Jacobites, who were always sure that this rebellion would be the one that would finally succeed, than I ever realized.

In my mind, though, we have a lot to hope for right now. In December, the first vaccines against COVID-19 were rolled out, most given as two-doses, three weeks apart. At first, only those at the highest risk—frontline healthcare workers and elderly people in nursing homes—were given the vaccine. Government officials said the rest of us should start getting access to a vaccine in March, and we should all be vaccinated by June. Many people were skeptical about this, but I held onto hope.

I got my second dose of the vaccine exactly a year after I returned from Scotland, giving my story a pleasing symmetry. As time goes on, more and more people are getting vaccinated, and there is hope that things will go back to normal soon. What that new normal will look like is anyone's guess, but as time goes on, we seem to have less and less to fear. Instead, we have reasons to be hopeful.



Living in Scotland and traveling around the country on my own only made me want to travel more. As I approach graduation, faced with the choice of where to go afterwards, I want to go someplace new. In an ideal world, I would move back to Scotland in a heartbeat. All this seems much less possible in the world of the coronavirus. I don't know what the world will look like after my graduation; I don't know what the economy will look like, and I also don't know how easy it would be to move from one place to another. Picking up and leaving like that is never simple, but now it seems even more complicated than before, especially since Europe seems to be faring worse than the US when it comes to the pandemic. At this point, I have no answers, just a lot of questions. We will have to see how things go.

I fully intend to return to Scotland someday. There are places there that I did not get to visit that I still want to see, and people I would love to go back and visit someday. I would love to live there again, hopefully for longer than two and a half months. I would love to see what will happen with Scottish independence, with Scottish Gaelic, and with Christianity there. I would love to return to the place where I felt so at home, where history ran so deep while I was given a clean slate, where I felt like I belonged even though I had no claim to the place. I cannot imagine living the rest of my life without returning to Edinburgh.

I have no idea when I will be able to return, how long I will be able to stay there, or what things will look like when I do. Perhaps the world will go back to normal, and I will move there someday, writing books about Scottish independence, Scottish Gaelic, Christianity, and travel. Only time will tell.

I learned a lot of things from Scotland. Some of those things made it into this thesis, while many others did not. But I think the biggest thing I learned in Scotland is that you cannot anticipate what the story will be before it happens. You can only tell a story in hindsight. Planning ahead is useful sometimes, but you cannot act as though those plans are set in stone. Even stone gets eroded over time. Things you never thought possible, both good and bad, will happen. There will be plot twists and pitfalls and stories cut short. You can plan all you want, but when the winds shift, all your plans will disappear in a puff of smoke. You may as well just live, ride the winds, and see where they take you.

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Biography

Abigail Bartz is a native Austinite who grew up dreaming of becoming a writer and a Longhorn. She arrived at the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2017, where she majored in Plan II Honors and pursued a Creative Writing Certificate. In the spring of 2020, she studied abroad in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh, an experience which provided the basis for this thesis. Throughout her university career, she was involved in several campus organizations, including *Hothouse Literary Magazine*, where she worked on the website staff. In her free time, she volunteered with Young Life, a Christian organization where she worked with students at a local high school. She will graduate from UT in May of 2021. Although she has no definitive plans for after graduation at this point, she hopes to pursue a career in writing, and will likely seek an MFA in Creative Writing sometime in the future.