

## Orkney Reflection

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I have been holding hands with a dead man since October — a man I have never met and will never know aside from the words that are spewed from those who loved him as they reminisce his presence. Clinging to an intention to give Jerry Campbell something he never had has opened up my heart to a foreign kind of grief; a grief in which I am not longing for a life for myself, but for Jerry. It has been a grief that doesn't make sense to me because how have I managed to grieve a life for a human I don't know? It terrifies me because I don't want it; I do not want to grieve if I do not have to, but this grief has been unavoidable. There was no possible way to cling to the intention to give back to Jerry if I didn't grieve the life he could have had. Giving back to Jerry through this trip meant that I had to grieve the experiences he could have had, but that I now had to experience for him. Preparing for this trip, I was ready to be in tune with myself, the work I wanted to create, and the grief I would feel for a man I did not know. No matter how fucking stupid I felt for grieving something and someone I had no connection to, I was ready to grieve in some form, whether it was small or big. I was ready, until grief swallowed me whole a week before the trip.

No matter how close I am to grief, it will never make sense to me. It is not necessarily the being of grief that doesn't make sense — I understand it's a being cradled by love and the proof of love's existence. What doesn't make sense to me is why it has to begin like it does — the loss of someone or something; the absence of existence and what was once before. I wish it never had to begin and then linger for lifetimes. What I don't understand is why Jerry, a 20-year-old man had to die; a son and brother who had dreams. He was here and then he simply became the suffocating grief for many people who loved him, and even for those who don't know him. I will

never understand why Jeremiah Lee Tevis had to die on October 2, 2004; 22 years old and simply taken, creating a hole within our family. I will never understand why 20 years later, Jeremiah's older brother had to be taken too. Because why isn't one enough? I will never understand why May 4, 2024, has to be another date that will lump within my throat forever. I will never understand why Jamison Charles Tevis will now be a name with memories attached to it. I will never understand why I had to be woken up by my mother that Friday morning, endure a ride that felt like an eternity, pick up my brother from school where he should have simply been learning that day, listen to the cries of my father as he recalled the Saturday morning he had to identify Jeremiah's body and now see Jamie's on a Friday morning, hear my aunt ask why God hates her for taking her two children, hold Jamie's hand while the only breaths coming from his lungs were because of a machine, listen to the prayer my mother spoke over his body as we let him go to the place that took him, and now be completely swallowed by grief. I suppose grief isn't supposed to be understood; I suppose we are not to understand why the fuck it must begin with loss and the creation of destruction within the hearts of people. I suppose it has to be accepted with trembling arms that don't want to take it; arms that have become too weak with hurt, but still have to hold the child of loss — grief.

Explaining this is detrimental to my reflection of Orkney because this was my trip; an intention to bring Jerry to life, preparing to feel deeply, and instead being suffocated by grief that I couldn't run from. This trip was every moment of a horrid nightmare replaying over and over again in my head. It was sitting at the dinner table, thinking of Jamie, and then feeling like I was hit by a freight train when it registered once again that he was dead. It was longing to be home so I could grieve with those that I loved and who were also hurting. It was having to watch my baby brother and father wheel a casket between aisles of people and wave to my crying mother

through a phone screen. It was realizing that I didn't get to see Jamie tended to and dressed with my father's hands, but that my last image of him is the shell of himself lying in a bed where I had to move tubes to brush my hands through his hair. It was feeling so alone in a place I was supposed to love and experience for Jerry. Instead, I had to experience it for the three of them. It's hard to be thankful to have the opportunity to experience this trip for Jerry, Jeremiah, and Jamie because I was never supposed to have to give to all of them. It was supposed to just be for Jerry. Jeremiah has been gone for too long, but Jamie is still supposed to be here. I was supposed to come home and he was supposed to be here. Now, he is in Scotland; they are everywhere.

My initial expectations of this trip versus what it turned out to be are drastically different for obvious reasons and because of everything I just explained. I expected to write. I did try, but it was nothing compared to what I had expected I would do, create, and finish while being there. Within that same realm, I also expected to be connected with my writing and creative side, but it was difficult to create when my mind, and entire existence really, felt clouded. I expected to simply be, but it is really hard to be when nothing feels real. I've been putting off this reflection because I was scared to discuss what this trip was for me: hard. It was hard to want to be there and it was hard to enjoy it. I was counting down the days to be home and I was trying to fill my days with busyness to make them go faster, and that made me sad because I knew there could have been more to this trip, not for myself, but for Jerry. I know that there is more, and I am worried I didn't give him what I had the intention to because of the state that I was in.

Since everything that I had assumed and planned before the trip became the absolute opposite, I had to change my perspective; I had to look for joy or something good in little moments. I had to look for healing and lessons and any sliver of peace. Although I still hurt beyond measure every day, I do feel as though there were things I learned because of the state I

was in while being on the islands. The islands are peaceful and they are beautiful and it was so easy to be in awe of the way that the world is over there. I connected to this idea the first time I made this trek, but I feel as though over the last two years I once again lost it. On my first trip to the islands, I was in awe of the same beauty that we all experienced. During that trip, I recognized that I seemed to be more taken aback by what was in front of me there than I have ever been by places such as my home. I found beauty on the islands in small places, and eventually, I questioned why I wasn't finding beauty in small places back home. The beauty of Orkney made me realize that I could find the beauty I was surrounded by in any place. There doesn't need to be a mountain or the depths of the sea surrounding me. I can find beauty in the flowers my mother is planting near our grand tree at the center of our driveway. I can find beauty in the coffee shop downtown where conversation and laughter happens. I can find beauty in the garden that is sprouting in the neighbor's yard. I can find beauty in the Christmas tree that is put up in the middle of town and decorated by the community. I can find beauty in the lady who decided to create a fresh-cut flower farm just because it brought her joy. There is beauty in many things and it is beautiful in different ways. The islands' beauty is different from that which we can find in a place like Kansas, whether it is a city or a small town. It's there and it has been here, but oftentimes we get disconnected and we don't recognize it anymore. A connection to the islands seems to bring back connections that I have lost, and despite everything, I'm glad I could still see this.

Like Amy Liptrot, I had healing to do; I have healing to do. I'm not sure I have much to say in connection to her because she explains it all in her book. I've always felt like I needed to get away from my home because I didn't want to be held back. Trips to places like Orkney have taught me that I have the capability to go, but they have also taught me that I don't have to run

from what has raised me and made me who I am; it is still a part of me. Amy came back to the islands to heal, and I think experiencing the islands is a testament to how they healed her. This second trip was different because I was longing to heal in my home with my people. Unlike but also like Amy, I don't think the islands healed me, but showed me the importance of whatever it is and wherever it is that you make your home. It's important to heal where you know you can heal and to heal around those you know will heal alongside you. Although I couldn't necessarily heal while on the islands because I was longing to be home, it made me realize the depths of my gratitude that I have for my home and my support system. Sometimes I don't feel like I can survive things such as this grief, but then someone hugs me, sits with me, pats my back, says kind words, and for a moment, I don't feel like I'm being suffocated. The grief I am feeling will always linger, and I don't believe that time is a thing that makes grief go away. Time allows my arms to become stronger to hold the grief within my hands and it allows me to hate it less and continue to love despite an absence. The islands gave me time to sit with this grief and feel it, and it gave me pieces of peace to take back home; it allowed me to breathe.

There were quiet moments like lonesome walks to benches where I felt the presence of three beings meet me. There were quiet moments on top of Hoy where I felt hurt but still felt happiness because I could feel three beings meet me there. There were moments of pure sadness and as if there was nothing to feel other than an all-consuming grief at dinner tables, but still feeling the presence of three beings trying to let me know that they were still there; they are still here. I will meet them at the edges of the sea, the tops of mountains, in the laughter shared with friends, drives down dirt roads to try to escape, across the world and right here at home. I felt them in Scotland, I will feel them every place my feet wander, and I will feel them even in places like home.