

The Power of Vulnerability By Genevieve Vahl

The most profound relationships come when you least expect them. Back in May, I traveled through Ireland and Scotland with my best friend, Henry. We started in Dublin and went to Belfast, ferried over to Glasgow and finished in Edinburgh. We left each city in more awe than the last. Until we reached Glasgow, we did not know a soul in the places we were visiting. We kept social by going to pubs and concerts. Drinking pints and smoking cigarettes was the European pastime we inherited. When we got to Glasgow, however, we met up with Henry's friend from home who goes to Glasgow Uni. Hoping for an insider's look into the city, we reached out to Lily. Little did I know she was going to have a profound impact on me.

The first night we linked with Lily, we met her at one of the classic student spots on campus. We sat in the grass on a hillside drinking beer together, brushing through all of the standard small talk "getting to know" one another, observing the dynamic of Glasgow Uni life. She told us of a function that night her uni radio station was hosting that she wanted to take us to.

After walking under highways and through a water treatment facility, we were approaching our destination. It was a very inconspicuous area of Glasgow, to say the least. We were walking down an alley behind a group of people seemingly going to the same place as us. They suddenly disappeared into an opening through some bushes. Shocked, we followed. We were winding on a dirt path lit by candles hanging in mason jars on the canopy of bushes above us. We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into.

The event turned out to be a compilation of DJs performing in an empty warehouse in the boonies of Glasgow. At first we were the only people at the event. Little did we know Glaswegians do not make their way out for their evening activities until midnight at the earliest. But we didn't let that postpone our fun—this gave Lily, Henry and I time to really open up to one another.

We sat on old spools circled together sharing stories and becoming ever more comfortable with one another. We engaged in conversation with people around us. It was a conglomerate of people from all over. Some from the UK, others from around Europe. Some people did not even go to the uni. It was a bunch of students, outcasts and friends who found their way to Glasgow.

Eventually, conversations split and Lily and I caught ourselves in deep conversation. We confided in one another. I was sharing information about myself I had never shared with anyone so quickly. She felt comfortable enough with me to share her tough experience being an international student. Making friends she really connected with was a struggle she faced all year. She confessed how refreshing and thankful she was to have become such good friends with me. She even showed me her personal music. She let herself be vulnerable, allowing me to reciprocate the mutual appreciation of her friendship to me. I found myself opening up to Lily in ways I do to my closest friends who I've known for years. But I had known this girl for less than

a day. She would listen to me and I would listen to her, we would empathize with one another, we would cheer each other on.

We eventually ditched Henry to dance in the warehouse where the DJs were playing. We twirled one another like a married couple, laughed at each other like babies and cared for each like best friends. We were in a setting neither of us had ever been in, an environment unfamiliar to both of us. We allowed ourselves to become vulnerable, quickly escalating our comfort with one another. This fostered a relationship we relied on. Lily and I, we formed this mutual appreciation within the other that we continued for the rest of our time together in Glasgow.

Glasgow is known as a gritty city, and many people find it hard to see past its rough exterior. High crime rates and a dark past give it a bad rap. Yet, I have such fond memories of an unexpected friendship. Lily showed me the power of vulnerability and how it can foster a relationship organically, forming a relationship from nothing to something beautiful. I have not seen Lily since, and do not know the next time I will see Lily again, but I am so thankful for the friendship we had for those four days.