

Delaney McDonough

For Amy

It all started when I was eight. For Christmas, I unwrapped a box set of Sinatra's greatest hits. At first, I was confused- like any eight year old would be who asked for a bicycle and instead got a box set of CD's with some old guy on the cover in a funny looking hat. Before I could ask, my dad whisked away with the set and popped it into his sound system. The first song that played was "Pennies From Heaven"- I knew I wanted more.

As I climb the stairs of the Camden Road stop off the Tube, London's underground system, I soak every sight, sound, and smell in. Taking careful note of everything I see, one thought lingers in the back of my mind - Amy. It's a cold Saturday filled with harsh winds and sudden rain clouds when I visit Camden Market. Camden is a place I've never been, a name rather, that I'd heard about and never forgot. Amy climbed these stairs. This was her home. Amy never really left.

I flashback to 2006 and I can hear her voice blaring from the surround sound speakers of my dad's house in Upstate New York. I'm in middle school, I don't really understand what the words mean but I like the way they sound and how they seem to travel through the air. Jazz, my dad says, is important for the soul. I've never disagreed.

Amy Winehouse was one of my dad's favorites- he collected her live shows and downloaded any recording he could get his hands on. The concerts played for our small living room audience while he cooked fancy, flavorful dinners with white wine. Her music surrounded me like a hug while my dad was preoccupied with cooking; Amy was like a nanny to me. This dark, mysterious woman covered in tattoos belting out her feelings, I felt like I knew her.

Winehouse was born on September 14, 1983 in Chase Farm Hospital in North London. Surrounded by the professional jazz musicians from her maternal uncles to her paternal grandfather, Amy's interest in jazz made perfect sense. Her father introduced her to Frank Sinatra, singing her his most popular hit "Fly Me To The Moon" whenever she got in trouble at school. Unfortunately, Amy's parents separated when she was nine and she lived primarily with her mother, only seeing her father on weekends.

I start walking down Camden High Street and I am overwhelmed. Little souvenir shops line both sides of the street with anything someone can think to print "London" on. It starts to sprinkle and I am only wearing a sweater, a thick one, but not thick enough for this. The wind picks up and teacups covered in red double decker buses shake in their outdoor kennel, with one eventually tumbling to the sidewalk, shattered. If there was ever a measurement for an amount of wind in London, it is was this. Next comes the downpour, and the tourists without umbrellas and proper rain attire, like myself, start to run for cover. Is this really her Camden Market?

My parents separated when I was very little, so little I don't think I have any memory of them actually being together. I lived with my mom and my step dad during the week, going to school at their new house in the country, but I stayed in my dad's house in the suburbs on the weekends. I lived for those weekends, filled with his wise words, fantastic food, and great music. My dad had to be the best dad there ever was - he showed me something new every time I saw him. In the first few years of my life, he gave me a love for classics: books, films, and albums. The first album I bought when I'd saved up enough of my allowance was Patsy Cline's Greatest Hits. I read Hemingway's the Old Man and the Sea at 10. I'd watched almost every episode of Little House On the Prairie upon completing

middle school. I watched Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca just shy of my 13th birthday. He brought me to different worlds each weekend, so naturally I always wanted to see him, and I wanted the next adventure. Our favorite though was the jazz; something about it filled us both with life. I clung to jazz when I wasn't with him - it felt like home.

Amy Winehouse's first album was titled with a name just one name, Frank. Debuting in October of 2003, Winehouse co-wrote each and every song. It went on to receive positive reviews and achieve platinum record sales, even nominating her for "British Female Solo Artist" and "British Urban Act" at the BRIT Awards. This album though isn't the one that would really make her famous, that would come three years later in 2006.

It's raining even harder as I walk across the Camden Lock, but the sight is so beautiful I stop for a second to watch a small boat pull into a dock at the marketplace. Oh, I think, that's the real market place. I hook a sharp right down the cobblestone alley, different cultures are blending as the smell of sweet Chinese chicken enters my nose and I can hear African bongos banging in the distance. What is this place? I have absolutely nothing to compare it to from back home. I am stunned. I am marveled. I am thinking of Amy.

The shops and booths seem to go on forever, tangled into each other. Everywhere I turn they surround me, I am lost but it's not so bad. I take shelter under a booth that looks like a shed, containing women's sweaters and necklaces. The woman stares at me, knowing I am not going to make a purchase, but doesn't say anything. I pretend to look around and I hear her laugh. I pull out the already downloaded map of London I have on my phone and I type in Hawley Arms. I'm only 197 feet away.

Winehouse's second album and final album, "Back to Black," hit stores in October 2006, her deep unique voice sang self-written songs producing five singles. This was the album that caught the attention of many, nominating Winehouse for two Grammy's, Album of the Year, and Best Pop Vocal Album, which she won. It took two more years for Back to Black to truly reach its peak; in 2008 Winehouse won five Grammys. Three in the categories of Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Female Pop Vocal all for her single "Rehab." The other two, Album of the Year as well as Best Pop Vocal Album, were for the album in general. As of today, it has sold 4 million copies in the UK alone.

When I think back to the woman that I watched in my dad's live couch concerts, I think of her tough attitude. She was so relaxed and poised on stage, with thousands of people cheering. My favorite concert was the one she would do later in 2007 at Porchester Hall for the BBC One Sessions. In a red dress with giant gold hoops, she would sing her heart out to her city. She pauses after playing her first two songs to take a sip of her beer and find her dad -- a woman after my own heart, a real dad lover. The crowd can tell she's a little awkward and shy on stage when she's not actually singing, but that's where she really shines. Strong, sexy and talented- this is how Amy should be remembered.

When I spot it, something goes off in my head- I am so close. The Hawley Arms I've seen in pictures is red but the one before me is wearing what looks like a new shade of black paint- maybe in mourning. I walk in half expecting her to somehow hand me a beer, I've seen so many pictures of her in and around the bar on the first floor of the Hawley. It's a small bar, with only four stools and standing room for a few close couples to squeeze in for a pint. All kinds of craft beers line the 10-foot bar, and I settle on UBU, which comes back to me in what can only be described as a measuring cup full of beer. I want to ask the

bartender about her, but I chicken out and find myself a seat in the place soaking in all the small details of it.

On July 23, 2011 Amy Winehouse was found dead by her bodyguard in her home on 30 Camden Square, she was 27. Multiple autopsies pointed toward the conclusion that Winehouse had died from accidental alcohol overdose- her blood alcohol content was .416, over five times the legal limit in the UK. Although her death came as a surprise and outraged much of the musical community, almost everyone knew that Winehouse had a history of struggling with addiction of both alcohol and several hard drugs. Her major single, "Rehab" had once been a humorous, fun tune but now served as an ironic reminder of the stigma that addiction treatment and programs have. Amy had also admitted she struggled with manic depression and bulimia. Winehouse would fight these battles with substance abuse, mental illness, and eating disorders up until that day - trying her hardest to stay away from her addictions proved to be difficult. After that day, Amy broke a Guinness World Record for most number of significant hit songs to hit UK charts by a woman.

It's a time to celebrate her life, I think, as I sit at the Hawley Arms. But Amy's addiction - the very one that drew her into this pub - was so deadly it couldn't be separated from her life. Looking at my beer, I'm wondering if this is the right way to say hello or even goodbye or if perhaps on accident by drinking I am only reminded of her death. Either way, I finish my beer and head off down the stairs to use the bathroom. As soon as I close the door I see them, hard and dark thick permanent marker, the memorials:

"Amy, I wish I could come with you. It hurts so much."

"Wisconsin loves Amy"

“Ciao Amy, you’ll always be with us!”

“See you on the other side, Amy Jade.”

“Silly Girl! How we miss you!”

Scribbled everywhere and anywhere they would fit, on the white ceiling and the wooden doors. These works of art blow me away- she will never be forgotten.

I need one more after that, I think, as I motion for the bartender, a slim girl with a chopped black bob. As she pours the dark Guinness into its glass, it comes on. I can already tell it’s him within the first five seconds but then I hear it - Fly Me To The Moon. She hands me the glass, full and foamy, and starts to sing, as do I. A tear falls from my eye and I realize there are two people who should be there with me.

I pull out my phone and find “Dad” in the contacts, hoping to send him a nice weekend text. It’s Saturday, one of our favorite Jazz days. I can still remember him fetching me from the pool that summer and sitting me down to tell me she was gone. We drank root beer floats and listened to “Loving is a Losing Game” in her honor.

“I found it,” I type, “and I had a beer for Amy.”