

Jack Nugent, DC – 2017

It's been a month. Four weeks, six days, eight hours and fourteen minutes later I'm no more than two blocks away from the Mayflower, in DuPont Circle Park. Make that fifteen minutes now. I'm not sure I can put my experience into a coherent essay. I'm not a good enough writer to illustrate the impact of my experience. So I'm not going to try to tell you how I feel.

Right now I'm sitting on a bench, listening to Stevie Wonder on repeat while a man circles on a rusty bike, shouting "Call 911," while a woman follows him with a bottle. The air smells like cigarettes, cannabis, and dog crap. There's a cop siren in the background. A balding white man slides next to me on the bench. He's on the phone, yelling - I can't make it out because Stevie is belting out the chorus of "Someday at Christmas." His red leather Converse juxtapose with the grime-ridden concrete.

This is my America. I love this park and I love its people. I'm a city slicker at heart, and while I love Shenandoah and the Potomac, these people are my tribe. At the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), I was forced to reassess the meaning of love. I still see Jack Warner's stern face, and hear his words: "to love something is to lie down and give up everything for it - to fight for it."

I don't love easily - love is fickle and love hurts. Love often is fleeting. And in a world of fake news, hate, partisanship, isms and schisms, love is also rare. In particular, it's seldom found in politics. Call me cynical, but I don't believe many of our elected officials love their jobs.

But I found love at USSYP. It was a love of countrymen, a love of government, and a love of the country. It's up to me to love wholly, equally, and unconditionally. I think if I am able to do so, I will be happy - regardless of what I end of doing. God knows, I'm not there yet and I'll probably never get there. But I do love this park, and I do love this city. I do love my country, and I do love my countrymen. I'm excited for the future, and bringing love back to politics.