

Samantha O'Sullivan, DC – 2018

Every morning I walk down 7<sup>th</sup> street in Southwest Washington, D.C. on my way to school. Well, speed-walk, as my feet race against the clock ticking down to the school bell. My eyes glance over the familiar sights of the Smithsonian museums and Washington Monument looming in the distance as I internally calculate what Metro line would be fastest to get to school. *Orange or Blue?* I race down the pavement, my eyes passing over the Capitol building and the chanting protestors in the distance... *But if I transfer at Metro Center I could take the Red line to...* I absentmindedly weave my way through a crowd of tourists with their red-white-and-blue patriotic gear and tune out their excited clamoring about their visit to the White House and the museums and the ... *Blue line.* I decide. *Blue line is fastest.*

After squeezing my way onto a packed train car I pick up a copy of the *Express* laying on a nearby seat. **SUPREME COURT JUSTICE NEIL GORSUCH...** the headline begins. And before my brain can register the next words on the page, I close my eyes and am hit by a wave of nostalgia. When I open my eyes again, there I am. Sitting in the front row of the Supreme Courtroom. The room is empty - besides my 103 fellow United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) delegates – and the highlight of the event – Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch – has not even walked in yet. But sitting there, in that moment, my heart is pounding. In that spot, I glance in awe at the nine empty chairs on the bench in front of me in the courtroom, and the weight of the moment hits me. I close my eyes and I see the bench again, but this time it's full, with nine old white men, delivering the verdict that Dred Scott is a slave and not a citizen. Not a man. I close my eyes again and I see Homer Adolph Plessy. The Scottsboro Boys. Mildred and Richard Loving. Jane Roe. I opened my eyes in the Supreme Courtroom as my heart pounded in my chest and in that moment I felt something change. I felt history come alive-

“NEXT STOP: FOGGY BOTTOM”.

The automated ding of the Metro car jolted me out of my daydream as I startled and looked down at the copy of *The Express* in my hands. In that moment, I felt incredibly foolish. Here I was, a week after USSYP ended, having spoken to a sitting Supreme Court Justice, numerous acting senators, and the president of United States - and yet I was daydreaming about sitting on a bench in an empty courtroom. The Supreme Court is open to the public all the time, I thought with a laugh, as I kicked myself internally. Why was I most moved by as a trivial experience as sitting on a public courtroom bench? Why wasn't it the dinner in the Jefferson room of the State Department or dinner with Senator King in the Archives or lunch with-

“DOORS OPENING. PLEASE STEP BACK TO ALLOW THE DO-“

Before I could contemplate the meaning of my ponderance I was interrupted by the loud clank of the Metro car doors opened as I grabbed my bag and squeezed out of tight car and sprinted up the escalators. Oh great, I think as I feel the raindrops hit my head, the one day I forget my umbrella. I cover my head with my hands as I weave in and out of the endless stream of lawyers and Senate interns on the sidewalk. The rain hits my cheeks and, I realize, it's going to look like I'm crying.

I close my eyes and I'm suddenly standing in the middle of a Mayflower Ballroom with a microphone in my hand, tears streaming down my face. Alone - except for my 103 fellow delegates - and, oh yeah, Congressman John Lewis. staring right at me. I wipe away a tear as I apologize and stumble over my words. It's all a blur, but I remember thanking him. For what? I don't remember. Inspiring me, I hope. Risking his life. Fighting so that I can exist.

There is not a day that goes by that I do not think about The United States Senate Youth Program and its impact on my life. I formed friendships that will last a lifetime and made memories I will brag about to my grandkids. I met my idols, grew my love for public service, and for the first time, felt history come alive.

USSYP has even influenced my iconic morning commute. Nowadays, on my way to school I try to walk a little bit slower and take it all in. I have lived in this city for 17 years, and yet just one special week in it truly changed my life. Now, I let my eyes linger for a little longer on the landmarks as I pass. Because I now know history is alive - I don't want to miss one second of it.