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Shoes

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Sabrina Morelli

Prompt 3

Shoes

“Sabrina, wake up, the storm is over.” I slipped out of bed and looked out of my window at a street I once knew- a street now buried beneath toppled trees, planks of decks and doors, full roofs, and three feet of water. It was especially silent when I walked downstairs into the dampness of my own home, and started gathering towels that we unsuccessfully tried to line the bottoms of our doors with to keep out the flood, soaked with salt water. It was October 2012, the year that superstorm Sandy had engulfed my community.

Freedom. It is the basis of this nation. Freedom to get ahead, to build the life you’ve always dreamed of, to expand to your full potential as long as you’re willing to work for it. I’ve always believed firmly in an entirely laissez-faire market; a market dictated by the natural course of business should always work out fairly and sensibly. Business owners should have the right to grow their markets without worry that their government will interfere in private enterprise or stunt the progress they have earned. Living in a small suburban town on Long Island, I’ve witnessed hard working people build small auto and boat repair shops or bait and tackle stores from the ground up; it was their livelihood and exemplified the soul of the American will. As I discovered reading Michael Sandel’s Justice, and in my own personal experience, there are some things that can only be truly understood by looking from a different perspective, or walking in the shoes of the person on the other side.

I slipped on those shoes- my old gray converse sneakers- and walked to the nearest store after the hurricane to buy more supplies. My home was among the few on my street still standing, and my cousins and grandmother, whose houses were washed away in the storm, had little choice but to come stay with us. As we entered winter, we had thirteen people in a four bedroom, water-damaged house

without power or hot water. Since all of our cars had been totaled by the storm surges, we walked two miles to the convenience store, only to find that flashlights that once cost \$10 were now \$40. Once one-dollar bottles of water were priced at \$10, and small electric generators were ticketed at \$4,000. At some gas stations, prices per gallon doubled. You could look elsewhere for a better price, but the closest store after that was another 3 miles away. A walk that far would be quite a trek in the lingering flood, and one unlikely to be completed within the constraints of the neighborhood's temporary curfew, which had been established to protect against looting.

Ironically, it felt as though business owners were the real 'looters' that locals needed to be protected from, as they seemed to be kicking storm victims while they were down. One could argue that the demand had been increased by a natural storm, so it is the business owners' right to raise the price of the supply in accordance with the change. However, the demand didn't increase out of a newfound, widespread love of flashlights, or a social trend that favored non-perishable foods; it increased out of necessity and suffering. Business owners were taking advantage of people in need. Entrepreneurs have the right to control and adjust their prices, but shouldn't parents at least have the opportunity to feed their children in the aftermath of the storm if they're willing to pay a reasonable price? I remembered how four years prior to Sandy, I watched those poor business owners struggle through the recession. I prided myself on my views that businesses are the building blocks of this nation, and that the government should take appropriate measures to protect and not interfere too heavily with what comprised our country's foundation. It was that day that I saw a common business practice as simply unjust, and saw the need for some governmental regulation. Walking out of that convenience store empty handed in my gray converse that day...it just didn't feel like America.

The 'right thing to do' has a far deeper set of meanings than I had considered years ago. In reading Justice, I kept thinking about that first page. And remembering how it felt to be in those shoes, I tried to slip into those metaphorical salt-water-soaked, gray converse through every situation Sandel

presented, and as I begin realizing the complexity of adult life. And as I search for the true meaning of 'justice' over the next four years and into the real world, I hope to keep in mind a word Sandel has whispered through every page: perspective.