

A Salty Serendipity

The Statue of Liberty is a proud symbol of one of the most powerful nations in the world; every American learns to respect her from a young age. I, however, did not only respect her—I was enamored of her. I would see her picture in my elementary school textbooks and on television and would simply stare in wonder, dreaming about seeing her in person. I had visions of climbing to the top of her torch and experiencing the world from an awe-inspiring angle.

On my eleventh birthday, I opened the gift I had always wanted: two tickets for a trip with my mom to New York during Christmastime. I eagerly packed my bags and pictured the beauties of New York lights, the decorated Rockefeller Christmas tree, grand Macy's displays, and most of all, the Statue of Liberty. The moment my toes reached New York soil, I immediately regretted not carrying four oversized sweatshirts and a heated blanket on the plane with me—New York is freezing, especially when accustomed to Arizona “winters.” My mom and I spent the first day in New York shivering, scouring the city for the best heaters and hot cocoa, and getting trampled by aggressive crowds trying to check items off their Christmas shopping lists.

The day finally came when my mom and I had planned to visit the Statue of Liberty. My mom laughed in blissful amusement as I begged her to take a picture of me standing next to two street performers painted green to look like my inanimate idol. As we boarded a white, sleek-looking ferry, I only had one golden sight in mind. My eyes were glued to the Statue of Liberty throughout the entire ride—no twinkling crystal blue

waters or New York City skyline could distract me. I simply could not believe she was real, and the closer the ferry got to Liberty Island, the more dreamlike she seemed.

Upon entering the monument site, I was handed a little mechanical box with cheap headphones attached. I looked up at my mom with a confused, semi-disgusted face as she returned with a disapproving look that urged me to put the headphones on and sulkily press play. I craned my neck to stare at the Statue of Liberty, half-expecting it to come to life and put on a show. But it just stood there. It looked exactly like how it looks in textbooks, except instead of spending a second to flip open a page, I spent days traveling to the other side of the country. I continued staring up at it, with boring facts being soothingly drilled into my mind through the cheap headphones. Additionally, guess who didn't get to go to the top of the torch as an eager and impressionable sixth grader? That's right, me. Apparently, people make reservations far in advance to be able to go up the Statue of Liberty, and even then the highest access point is only in the crown! It took about fifteen minutes before all I wanted to do continue my hot cocoa search.

Then came the turning point; my mom handed me five dollars and let me pick out a snack from a street vendor. I remember spotting the vendor's bags of unfamiliar Smartfood white cheddar popcorn with a wet tongue and hungry eyes. I enacted the exchange and burst open the small black bag. An enticing scent drifted out immediately. I raised a piece to my mouth and tried it with an eager curiosity. The white cheddar particles coated my tongue as I shoved my hand back into the bag to grab more. I had found a new idol. Sorry Statue of Liberty, but you have been outdone.