

Dear Future Self,

You are 18 now, old enough to vote in this next election. Old enough to take a part in our democracy.

Before you make the decision on who to vote for, I think that it is important that you remember what happened four years ago, the week Trump was elected. I doubt you've forgotten, but if you have, let me remind you.

Our family cares a lot about politics, cares a lot about getting involved. Ever since our brother, Sammy, and our mom went canvassing back when Obama was being elected for the first time, it has been a given that we would canvass the day that Hillary was up for election. The build-up was filled with excitement. Sammy was the president of the Young Democrats Club at school and had been for three years; the countdown until the day we could campaign stretched out for weeks.

The Saturday before the election, we were walking down the street to knock on the first door, giddy with the excitement that campaigning provided. Giddy at the prospect of making a difference. We felt powerful, proud.

"I don't want to wake up on Wednesday kicking myself for not doing everything I could've done to make a difference." Dad had explained. That was how I felt too.

By the time all the news and everything I'd read had added up, it seemed like a great idea to me. I was excited, happy to be helping out Hillary Clinton because she cared about the things that I care about: inclusivity of race, religion, sexuality and gender. It felt good to be representing those things.

There we were on the road, about to knock on the first door. We had little Hillary pins with that H logo all over our jackets; I wore blue earrings just for the occasion. I felt cool. Mature. I felt like I

was part of the electorate, even though I wasn't old enough to vote. It felt like I was doing something that was *really* impacting the world.

We were rounding the corner to the very first house where a man was blowing his leaves on the lawn.

He was short and stocky with orange hair and an orange beard. We could smell cigarette smoke wafting from his house, and when we got closer, body odor wafting from his blue Old Navy hoodie. He turned his leaf blower off. "Hello," Dad said, waving. Representing Hillary, we wanted to make the most cordial impression possible.

I smiled at him, a little angel. I could almost feel my halo glowing. I was doing the right thing. But he didn't get the memo about being cordial.

"There's no soliciting in this neighborhood!" He yelled at us, a deep voice. A threatening voice.

"We're not soliciting, sir." Dad's halo glowed with a fierce intensity. I nodded in agreement with his statement. My halo's glow matched that of Dad's. Shimmering brightly. Blindingly.

"Oh yeah?" He reminded me of a middle school bully. "Go tell Hillary to fuck herself! She's a baby killer! And go fuck yourselves too!"

It all came crashing down, the halos, the happiness, the superiority we'd been feeling. We felt threatened for our lives. The politics got personal and aggressive.

I forced Dad to Google the gun laws in Pennsylvania where we were. In my mind, there was a 50/50 chance he would come out with a gun and shoot us. I had never experienced fear for my life before.

I realized that of course it wasn't right for him to yell at us, but I began to question my thinking as well. Was I an angel for doing this, or was I just another opinionated person?

The election was a brewing pot, and anger was coming off like steam from all sides. I didn't deserve to be the target of his anger, but his pot was boiling, and we were an obvious target. There we were parading proudly with our little stickers pinned to our chests. His rage made it all seem so stupid and flimsy.

The thing is, campaigning for what you believe in is not stupid. We were knocking on the doors of other democrats to ask them whether or not they had a plan to vote. We weren't soliciting, weren't damaging property, weren't even bothering anyone.

The anger trailed with us throughout the day, and made us want to quit before we'd even started. It seeped into our clothes and skin and clung with us until election day.

The angry man had won. Anger had won.

Anger had won all around the world. I didn't feel safe, even at school.

A window in the commons of the high school was broken as well as several students' noses. An ambulance came to school to pick up a girl who had a panic attack. There was so much fear. Fear of deportation, fear of removal of rights. Enough fear to black out.

It wasn't just the Trump supporters who were being violent, though. Clinton supporters were throwing punches back and starting fights as well. They were excluding people who said they voted for Trump and antagonizing every girl they could find for voting for such a misogynistic man. There were slurs being thrown back and forth from both sides.

I shut down, did what I always did when I was confronted with a problem: I pretended it didn't happen. I would press the fear down under the teacher's droning voices and pretend that I wasn't scared to walk through the hallways or scared to be around people who were wearing symbols from Trump's side.

Sammy wore a Black Lives Matter shirt, and I was too scared to walk with him through the hall after he dropped me off at school. I would walk by his classrooms in secret to make sure he didn't have a black eye yet, then go into the bathroom and take relieved breaths.

As days and then a week passed, I realized that he was our president, whether I liked it or not. No one was going to tell me that it was a bad dream because it wasn't. I started to perceive the negative emotions as a call for action, and woke up out of my own denial.

Dad told me that America would be okay. It really would. There is so much we can do; our voices can still be heard. Peace didn't go away. It is our job, it is my job, to make sure that it never goes away.

So, Future Self, when you fill in that ballot, remember that you can still make a difference. Regardless of the outcome.

Sincerely,

You