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Shopping with Shannon

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Passport? Check. Money? Check. Flashlight? Check. Alright! I was all packed for my trip to the Dominican Republic. As I took a final look at my suitcase, I realized that I had everything, but soap. In that moment, I did what I always do when I need help. The phone rang and I was eased by the familiar voice of my mentor, Shannon Taylor. For the past year, Shannon has been so supportive and is one of the reasons I have been successful in college. She has proofread my essays, fed my empty stomach, and wiped my tears on several occasions. Being an out of state student can be quite difficult in that I am so far removed from my family and support system. In the distance, Shannon has filled the shoes of an older sister who showers me with love while not hesitating to offer her opinion and illuminate areas of improvement in my life. On the phone, I expressed to her my lack of adequate traveling toiletries and, as usual, she offered a solution.

Passing through the sliding doors, the noise of Westfield Mall ambushed Shannon and I like the unexpected puff of air to the eye at the optometrist's. As the scent of food excited our stomachs, we decided to stop for lunch at Olive Garden. There, I brought Shannon up to speed on my life, sharing my great anticipation and expectation for my summer adventures. At one point in our conversation, I thought maybe she was more excited than even I was.

“So tell me what your June looks like again,” she said.

“Well, I am leaving tomorrow to study abroad in the Dominican Republic with some fellow first generation college students. When I get back, I have a few days to pack, then I travel home to surprise my father for his 50th birthday in Ohio. I'll spend some time in Chicago to visit my sister before I go to New York for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company Workshop. Once that is over, I will return back to LA and to work.”

“Wow girl!” she said. Shannon continued to encourage me and concluded with, “We better go get some body wash for your trip.”

Walking through the doors of Bath and Body Works, I was engulfed by the aroma of freshly picked flowers beneath my nose. I scanned the colorful spectrum of shelves to find Cotton Fresh body wash. Out of the soft melody of the background music emerged a conversation between Shannon and I. She began to share memories of working at Bath and Body Works while in college. She laughed at the fact that she spent nearly all of her paycheck in the store. On the way to the car, my curiosity about Shannon's college experience grew as large as the food baby I had from the chicken alfredo and five breadsticks. I asked her if she received any financial support from her family as she pursued higher education.

While acknowledging the contribution of her parents, Shannon still had to work three different jobs to sustain herself through college.

Back in my apartment, I added the body wash to my bag as tears accumulated in my eyes. I was in awe that Shannon and I shared similar college experiences. Prior to beginning college, I was selected as the top 4% from a competitive applicant pool to live and work with a close-knit 24-member team called the Student Worker Program. During my freshman year, I established a strict sense of discipline working before regular office hours at 6:30 AM as a Waste Management & Recycling Team Member. We collected, emptied, and replaced recycling and solid waste containers for a community of 6000, sorted recyclables from solid waste and disposed of plastic, cardboard, and aluminum by operating heavy recycling machinery such as a cardboard compactor and conveyer belt. That year, I developed a deep understanding of the significance of manual labor. Sophomore year, I spent my 20 hours per week as the Student Manager in the office of Student Leadership and Development at LMU. There, I oversaw all student staff, created new office protocol, and assisted in establishing university programming. Outside of working in our placements, the Student Workers set-up major university events (hundreds per year) including the assembly/removal of 16,000 chairs for LMU undergraduate, graduate, and Loyola Law School commencements each year.

This upcoming year, I have the privilege of leading the Student Worker Program as the General. I take great pride in this leadership role, but it comes with challenges and difficulties. Having a college career centered around work often makes me feel isolated from the average college student. I have had to turn down numerous social events and even academic opportunities because I had to work. Many of my peers call their parents frequently for recreational funds while I spend hours budgeting so that I can simply pay of my student account. At times I feel misunderstood by students and faculty alike. But during that day I spent with Shannon, my sense of loneliness dissolved like Alka-Seltzer in water.

Many people share common experiences without ever knowing it. We must be vulnerable enough to share our experiences. Our willingness to share could propel another toward their future through cultivating a sense of belonging. So for those who have been quiet, now is your time to speak. Talk about the moments in your life when you were the happiest, those emotional wounds you received as a child, or that one time when you laughed so hard that you cried. And to those who work hard for what you desire, ask questions and be encouraged that your experience is

not only your own. There is someone else in your world who has been through a similar situation. You are not alone. You are not alone.

Alright! I'm ready to go abroad. Soap? Check. Charger? Check. Toothpaste?...
Toothpaste? Aww shoot.