



Thank You America for Our Many Freedoms: May We Never Take Them for Granted

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Our 31st U.S. President Herbert Hoover said, "Freedom is the open window through which pours the sunlight of the human spirit."

Agreed. I'm grateful to live in the U.S.A. for many reasons, including our many freedoms.

I'm grateful for the freedom to walk into a library, and access books that share human stories and knowledge from the beginning of humankind, and read them for free.

I'm grateful for the freedom to start my own business, and earn a good living doing creative work that matters with people I enjoy and respect.

I'm grateful for the freedom to get in a car and go where I want, when I want, with whom I want.

That's one of the reasons, a few years ago, I gave away 95% of what I owned and headed out on a Year by the Water to explore this marvelous country of ours.

My goal was to visit bodies of water and write about the people I met, the experiences I had, the epiphanies and stories that emerged along the way.

I'll always remember what a joy it was to sail the Chesapeake Bay, swim in Walden Pond, cavort with Zach the Dolphin, and many other memorable adventures.

One of my favorite drives was through the Great Smoky Mountains on July 4th, listening to the final Prairie Home Companion radio show, broadcast live from the Hollywood Bowl.

Barack Obama called to give Garrison Keillor a shout-out for his 41 years of storytelling. Keillor asked him, "Mr. President, what are you looking forward to when you're out of office?"

Obama laughed, "Getting in a car and going for a drive with no Secret Service."

Exactly. I can hardly express how thrilling it is to head out on an open highway, never knowing what's around the next bend or over the next hill. To me, it is the epitome of freedom.

Yet many of us take it for granted. Why?

Well, as Abraham Maslow pointed out in his Hierarchy Pyramid of Needs, "Satisfied needs are no longer motivators."

For example, if we don't have food, water, shelter, freedom or safety. it's all we can think about.



Once we have them though, we tend to overlook them and take them for granted.

That's a regret waiting to happen. Freedom is far too precious to take for granted.

This was brought home during a winter vacation to Yosemite. My sons and I lived in Maui at the time, so playing in the snow was a big draw for them. What we hadn't counted on was a blizzard that kept us inside the lodge. No worries, there were board games and ping pong so we were happy campers.

One night, the manager told us he was worried about a couple who should have checked in that afternoon, but hadn't arrived. This was before cell phones. The manager didn't know if they'd slid off the slippery road, or what.

Suddenly, the door blew open and in walked the overdue couple. We all rushed over to find out what had happened.

They told us they had gotten lost, but here's the thing, they hadn't panicked because they were in the... United States.

See, they had grown up in the Soviet Union. If they wanted to travel internally in Russia, they had to give authorities their itinerary. If they didn't arrive at checkpoints by a certain time, they could be interrogated, even arrested.

The couple said they didn't panic as they had enough food, water and blankets to be okay until they finally found the lodge or they were rescued. At least they didn't have to worry about being tossed in jail.

Their story had an enduring impact on my sons and me. We promised to never take our freedom of movement - in all its forms - for granted.

How about you? Has your freedom of movement become a satisfied need?

Are you and your family members taking it for granted?

What will you do this weekend to honor and celebrate what a privilege it is to head out on an open road and explore new places, meet new people, experience new adventures?

To paraphrase Herbert Hoover, freedom is the open road through which pours the delight of our adventurous human spirit. May we take it for gratitude, instead of taking it for granted.