



Little Freedoms

By Carol Harper

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I recently attended a Jackson City Council meeting, and sat at the media table—something I hadn't done in a while. Years ago, Jackson used to be my beat when I was a reporter for the *Ledger Dispatch*, and it was interesting to see that not too much had changed (except for a changing of the guard) as far as how meetings were conducted.

About an hour and a half went by as the city council members patiently listened to each citizen as they voiced their concerns about the National Hotel. The majority expressed their gratitude; some were even downright passionate in defending the fact that the National was being renovated by local businessman Stan Lukowicz, that he cared enough to take on the monumental project with his own dollars. Others brought out the importance of the historicity of the project, that, although the necessary i's were dotted and t's crossed as the project floated through the Planning Commission and City Council, it might have been nice for the local historical organizations to be consulted or included—whether the issues were about windows, doorknobs, paint, stucco...or walls that might tumble down.

In any event, American citizens have a right to build a business, just as much as they have a right to be heard in a city council meeting. An hour and a half could be viewed as a waste of time—or a chance to witness the American voice in action.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” The First Amendment, Constitution of the United States

When I was young, on most Sunday mornings and evenings, I would accompany my dad as we walked over to the church next door and raised the U.S. Flag. He had actually made the pole that the Flag waved upon; every weld from top to bottom had meaning. He taught me how to fold and unfold the Flag, how to respect it, not to let it touch the ground. I would watch as it would unfurl on the way up the pole, the sun shining through the stars and stripes as I'd watch it snap in the wind.

“The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.”
- Proposed Flag Desecration Amendment for the Constitution of the United States

When I worked in the Bay Area, I had a Russian friend/co-worker who told me the story of when she first came over to the United States. She was in her early teens, and her grandmother had won a lottery for a one-way ticket to America. Knowing that she was at the age where young Russian girls had no choice but to submit to prostitution, her grandmother gave the ticket to her, along with the blessing and hope for a better life.

Lisa Furzikova's first experience in an American grocery store was a Safeway store. Her eyes bugged out of her head as she had never seen so much food in her entire life. She said she spent over two hours, taking individual food items off of the shelves, staring at them as if she had never before seen a jar or can of food.

"You don't know what you have here," she said, as she told this story at the party after her Naturalization ceremony.

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the armed forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose." - Oath of Allegiance, Rule 8, Subdivision C

About seven months ago, I drove from Nashville, Tennessee to Amador County, California, and flew past signs that read: "The People of Iowa Welcome You", "Nebraska: The Good Life", "Welcome to Colorful Colorado", "Welcome to Wyoming: Forever West". There were no border patrols, no military with machine guns. I stayed in whatever hotel I wanted to, ate at whatever restaurant I felt like. Besides spotty cell phone service now and then, my road trip across America was as easy as taking a trip across town.

"Our unity as a nation is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods. The ceaseless flow of information throughout the Republic is matched by individual and commercial movement over a vast system of interconnected highways crisscrossing the country and joining at our national borders with friendly neighbors to the North and South.

Together, the united forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear—United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts." - President Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 22, 1955

As I watch and read the news each morning, I often wish I could rise above the chaos and drama and have the perspective that space shuttle astronauts have of Earth. How little we are, how vulnerable and fragile everything is! As we celebrate Independence Day, are we really independent? Or do we rely on each other, are we dependent upon each other to strengthen our lives, our families, our communities, our economies, our nation?

Why are Americans free to speak, free to travel, free to worship, free to grow, build and create? I believe it's because our Founding Fathers had an incomparable vision of the future (note that I didn't say "infallible"). So today, as we might attempt to prophesy a constitution for our own selves, our children and our children's children, I hope and pray that we will not only remember

our dependence on independence, but that we will always respect the symbols that represent those little freedoms that remain unparalleled in the world.

*If blood will flow when flesh and steel are one
Drying in the color of the evening sun
Tomorrow's rain will wash the stains away
But something in our minds will always stay*

*Perhaps this final act was meant
To clinch a lifetime's argument
That nothing comes from violence and nothing ever could
For all those born beneath an angry star
Lest we forget how fragile we are*

*On and on the rain will fall
Like tears from a star like tears from a star
On and on the rain will say
How fragile we are how fragile we are*

("Fragile" Words & Music by Sting)

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