

Freedom's Price

My 12th birthday was a carefree day of chocolate cake and swimming with friends. Little did I know that exactly two weeks later, my life, and the course of my country, would be changed forever.

September 11th dawned a typical day...I thought. Then news came that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center's north tower. Most Americans thought it was an accident. But when a plane smashed into the second tower less than twenty minutes later, we realized this was no accident.

I was just a child when two fuel filled airplanes slammed into our nation's beacons of prosperity, causing them to crumble to the ground like dominos, yet I will never forget that day. September 11th taught me numerous lessons: to live each day as if it were my last, to love, forgive, and risk more freely. Most importantly, it reminded me to be thankful for the freedom I experience as an American citizen.

As I ponder September 11th, about the wars our nation is fighting because of it, I remember the old adage: "Freedom *isn't* free." Indeed, the freedom we enjoy in America today is incredibly costly and should never be taken for granted. Our freedom has been secured by the blood of American patriots who have lived, fought and died around the globe down throughout the centuries. I close my eyes and remember them...

Fifty-six men are signing something they are calling a "Declaration of Independence." Diplomatic attempts have failed them. They are left with only two choices: live under the oppression and taxation of the British to save their own skin, or fight for a cause that seems un-winnable. They have considered carefully the charter they are about to send.

Sending this document is openly defying their King. By signing the parchment, they are rebelling against their mother country, against their own government. They choose to send the document regardless, thereby risking their families, their fortunes, their all. They have security...yet they value independence more. Each man dips his quill into the ink and writes his name in firm, bold strokes. Each man realizes that by doing so he is sealing his fate; the punishment for rebelling against the Crown is death. Yet each man has calculated the cost and decided that liberty is worth dying for.

The scene metamorphoses into another. "Don't fire until you can see the whites of their eyes!" comes the command. I see white knuckled patriots gripping their muskets. Their eyes are full of fear...and determination. The cause they are fighting for is *worth* fighting for; they *aren't* going to give up! Often they are starving, discouraged and afraid, yet they battle on for independence.

I ask myself why they fought. *Why was risking their lives better than living peaceably under the King's rule?* But when I ask myself that question, I understand. Because my freedom-of religion, of speech, of the press-means everything to me. America's founders did not want to merely exist under the rule of the King, they wanted to truly live. And to do that, they must have freedom. So they fought to secure freedom for themselves...and for future generations. Our founding fathers could not promise America's inhabitants great riches or good health. Instead, they offered something far more precious: the gift of freedom. A gift that far too often leaves behind fatherless children and grieving widows, a gift that sometimes demands the ultimate sacrifice. A gift secured by brave men and women and unsung heroes. A gift that is expensive, yet has been proven to be worth the

price.

In the aftermath of September 11th, as American soldiers were sent to invade Afghanistan, our country was reminded anew that freedom is far from free. It comes at the price of sweat, blood, tears, and American lives. September 11th tells us that freedom is not a guaranteed right; it is a privilege we must fight to defend. But it reminds us of one more thing: no matter how hard or long the struggle, freedom is worth the price we must pay for it.

Freedom. It's worth it. But it's far from free.