

THE COLUMBIA COUNTY
America 250
ANTHOLOGY



A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS CELEBRATING
THE NATION'S BIRTHDAY

Copyright

The Columbia County America 250 Anthology

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Preface

The Columbia County Authors Alliance is honored to present this anthology commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States of America. Within these pages are short stories, personal essays, and poems written by residents of Columbia County, Oregon, each offering a unique perspective on our nation, our community, and the experiences that have shaped us.

This collection features the voices of twenty-seven individuals, including eighteen adult writers and nine young authors aged twelve and under. Together, they represent a remarkable cross-section of our community, demonstrating that every generation has a story worth telling.

These works preserve the thoughts, memories, hopes, and creativity of local residents, creating a lasting record for future generations to discover and appreciate.

We extend our sincere gratitude to every contributor for sharing a piece of themselves. It is our hope that this collection inspires reflection, fosters a deeper appreciation for our shared history, and reminds us that the story of America continues to be written—one voice, one community, and one generation at a time.

PART 1: YOUTH CONTRIBUTORS
(UP TO TWELVE YEARS OF AGE)



America 250 Acrostic Poem

By Brinlee Bowen

America, our America
My home, everyone's home
Equality, we are treated equally
Rights, we have some rights
Independence, we can mostly do whatever we want
Capable, we are capable of amazing things
America, our America undefined

America 250th Celebration

By Willow Condelles

I've lived in the U.S.A for my whole life, so automatically, whenever I think of America, I think home. However, if I were someone who had never been to the U.S. before, I'd probably think of the national 4th of July holiday, which is something we love to celebrate here.

For me, the 4th of July is about celebrating with fireworks, love, and togetherness with my family. I always celebrate by going down to the river and watching the beautiful exploding colors of the fireworks in the sky, as well as walking around downtown with my parents. I love dancing to the live music downtown and the smell of fireworks and food from the vendors. It smells like tradition. Then, I go home and stay up late lighting up our own fireworks. I love the sparklers that I make shapes and words with that light up the dark night sky. I put on small sparkler performances each year for my parents.

I'm so happy I've already lived here for 12 years, and I am excited to see what the future holds for the coming years. I'm so thankful to be able to live in this beautiful and safe country. I hope it just keeps getting better and better, more and more problems go away, and less and less are made. I love the U.S.A a lot because it has already provided me a great home for so long, and I hope I continue to grow and nurture here. Happy 250th birthday America!

This Tree

By Opal Icenogle

As I solemnly willow,
I wander,
almost like a daydream
fairly in a trance
just another excess day
in this everlasting
chronicle of mine.

Whilst I perch
on this dedicatory tree,
it's wandering
limbs flow like
an angel going back up.

And so, I wait as I drift
into dreamland yet again.

I hear a mourning dove,
it's beautiful chirps are like
raindrops in a glistening cave
in the afternoon sun.

250th Birthday

By Bailey Kenny

A home to be proud of
My home.
Enjoying our freedom.
Reflecting on our past.
I'm proud of my home.
Celebrating the 250th birthday
A home to be proud of.
Freedom is good.
Our home.
United States of America.
Red, white and blue.
Time is different from before.
Home is here.
Our home.
Freedom is good.
July fourth
United States of America.
Liberty
Your home too.

Horses in America

By Audrey McCord

Horses are a big part of history. They pull wagons, they pull royal carriages, they have been in wars. Back in 1776 they were used to pull carts. Now they are used in races.

Horses are very important. How would we get around back then besides walking? We used them almost daily now and then.

The Native Americans and cowboys used them differently. Cowboys used them to capture cows and pull carts. Native Americans did not use saddles, they used decorations instead.

As an example of how horses were used is the Pony Express. It was a mail service that could deliver within 10 days instead of a few months.

That is why horses are a big part of history.

America Now or Then

By Aeris McKnight

Baseball caps or bonnets,
Graphic novels or sonnets,
Dresses or jeans,
Jasmine or Irene,
New or old,
Good food or with mold,
Just books or internet,
Called with a phone or met,
President or king,
Planes or a bird with wings,
13 “states” or 50,
America now or then

Olivia's Immigration

By Emmilynn Naeve

Hi I am Olivia, I am 11 and I have 1 sister that is 2 and a brother that is 6. My mom and dad are 33. We are from the UK and immigrating to America. I am arriving tomorrow.

I woke up feeling sick, and my brother asked, "Are you OK?" "I am not feeling the best," I answered. I am hoping he falls asleep so I don't have to deal with him, but he does not. The rest of the day flies by with people packing. I was just making the last of the food. I fell asleep at 9:00, excited.

I woke up thrilled to get off this ship. In about two hours we will arrive. We docked, and I ran off the ship. Kids surrounded me with questions, like "how old are you?", "Do you have any siblings?". I laughed and said "I am 11, and yes".

After everyone got off, we made camp. I got fresh food for the first time in forever. I inhaled dinner. I got up and saw a girl, so I tried to make a friend.

I ask, "What is your name?". It was Nova. "Do you want to play"? She said yes! "Let's play tag, you are it". She counted to 5. I went behind the tent. She spotted me, and said, "Tag you are it."

I asked, "Do you want to meet my parents?" "Sure, I will". We went over, "Mom, Dad, this is Nova," I said. "Nice that you made a friend, but you should go to bed."

U.S.A 250 Years Ago

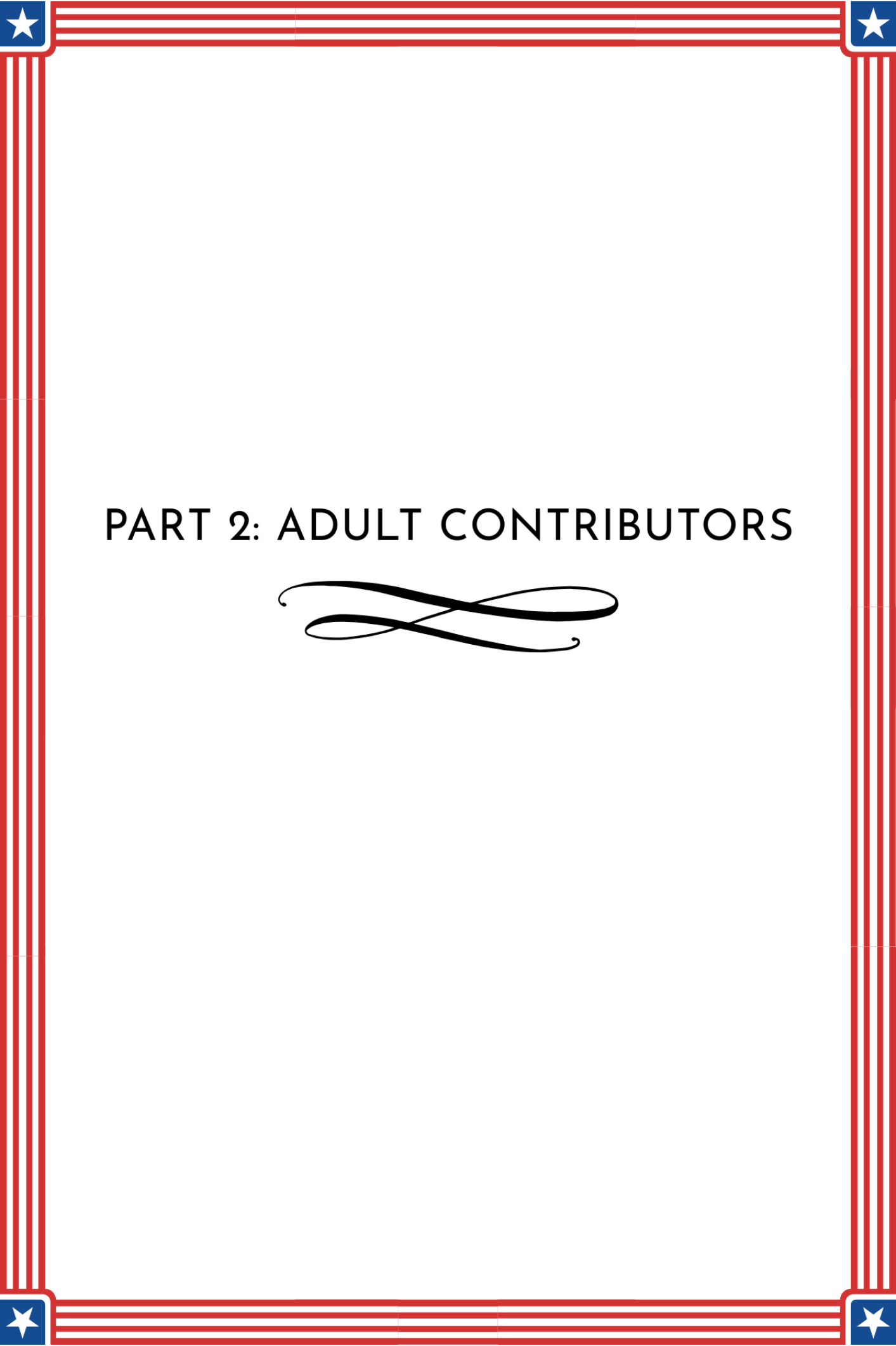
By Evan Sorber

The U.S.A 250 years ago was a mess, nothing quite right but still a starting point not everything was good but it eventually would be. It started with the declaration of independence, a step in the right direction. Soon after the declaration of independence the next thing happened, the bill of rights in add on to the constitution, now far from the start people for the first time people felt free. But man were even more unhappy, it was voting. It had frustrated many finally in 1870 they passed a law so all men could vote. This left people even more frustrated especially women, they were rightfully mad that only men could vote so they did something about it and after many years of protest and many sent to jail it finally happened all people could vote it was a giant mark in history. Later they lowered the voting age to 18 but one things for sure this place is nothing like it started.

What Does America Mean to You?

By Beau Taylor

It means that there is joy and happiness for all people.



PART 2: ADULT CONTRIBUTORS



What Does America 250 Mean to You?

By Kathy Antonich

As all Americans celebrate this landmark anniversary that represents 250 years of freedom, independence, and the establishment of a democracy fought for by citizen soldiers, I reflect today on those who served and sacrificed as military members and their families to uphold the Constitution, and sustain those freedoms that we still enjoy today—the right to free speech, right to assemble, and the right to bear arms, among many others.

As a veteran myself, I continue to honor and serve this great country and our Columbia County community by being a member of J.H. Wellington American Legion Post 0042, St. Helens, Oregon, which was chartered according to the original By-Laws on September 28, 1919, celebrating 100 years in September 2019. The American Legion bases its core values on a foundation of mutual helpfulness, patriotism, and community service; and “Veterans Strengthening America for God and Country” are core principles of this organization.

In celebration of 100 years, I was curious about the name J.H. Wellington, and using historical records available on line, found the post is named after John “Duke” Wellington, a Navy veteran of both the Spanish American War and the “World War”. In 1920 he ran as the Republican candidate for Columbia County Sheriff and served in that capacity for two terms from 1920 to 1928. He became a popular, prominent citizen and farmer in St. Helens, OR. It seems fitting that as a member of the American Legion Columbia Post No. 42 upon his WW1 enlistment and a veteran of the Spanish American War, his dedicated military service and legacy were honored in the naming of the post.

One hundred years later, post members continue to be active participants in our local community through events such as placing flags at local cemeteries for Memorial Day; Veterans Day services; flag raising ceremony at the County Fair and assisted living facilities; Kiwanis parade flag bearers; “bell ringers for 4th of July; providing funeral/memorial service details for fallen veterans; offering scholarships to local high school students who had/have a military member in their family; offering HS students opportunities such as attendance at Boys’ and Girls’ State; Law Enforcement Camp; making & taking holiday gift bags to local veterans in nursing homes and assisted living facilities; provide presence at the Veterans Bunker in St. Helens; and respond to veterans’ requests.

At this 250-year special anniversary to celebrate America, I’m thankful to American Legion Post 0042 members who continue their service and dedication to “keep America great”, to promote patriotism and a sense of pride to be an American, and to always remember those who fought for the freedoms we enjoy every day.

With Love

By Rachel Armitage

The following is an abridged version of the speech Rachel Armitage gave when sworn in to the Oregon State Senate on January 21, 2022. Armitage was appointed to represent Senate District 16, which included Columbia, Clatsop, and Tillamook County as well as parts of Multnomah, Washington, and Yamhill County. Senator Armitage's first session was also Senate President Peter Courtney's last. President Courtney, Oregon's longest serving Senate president, was elected to the Oregon State Senate in 1998 and retired in early 2023.

Good afternoon. Thank you Senate President Courtney for your warm and kind welcome; and thank you and to our Chief Justice Martha Walters. Wow. What an honor.

The moment in which I enter the Oregon legislature is not lost on me. Right now, our country is at odds. The divides that separate Republicans and Democrats seem to be as extreme and poignant as ever. Inspired by the geography of our rural and urban divide, contempt for fellow Americans—for fellow Oregonians—dominates our political process.

My mom is a teacher—and she'd tell you that in elementary school, one of the first things we learn about is opposites. My dad is a pastor—and he'd tell you the opposite of contempt is love.

It's love that raised me—my Grandma C who encouraged me to read books at a young age. My Grandma Jean who bought me my first pair of tap shoes and taught me how to cook. It's love that supports me now—my best friends who are honorary siblings. My siblings Brianna, Chad, and Claire, who are my lifelong best friends.

It's with love that I take on this role—love for this district. From the stunning coastlines, golden marshes, to the majestic forests. Love for the hard working folks in every

county—Tillamook, Clatsop, Columbia, Washington, Multnomah, and Yamhill—farmers, brewers, teachers, nurses, fishermen, construction workers and small business owners.

And, love for this state. Beautiful Oregon.

As the new State Senator of district 16, I hope my constituents know that I take this job seriously. I will represent you to the very best of my ability—no matter where on the political spectrum you land. We will likely disagree at times, but you will know exactly where I’m coming from, and how the decision was made. I hope you will weigh in as often as you want about how the issues we’re debating here in Salem affect you and your family. And, if ever you need help with anything that you think our office might be able to fix, I hope you’ll give me a call. My door is always open, and my phone is always on.

As a working class kid from Medford, this day is a pretty big deal. But this day is not about me. It’s about us—and what we can do together—with love.

Semi-Stream-of-Consciousness Semiquincentennial Musings

By Patrick Birkle

I was born twenty-five days after the centesimum octogesimum tertium anniversarium of the United States of America which means that I will celebrate my sexagesimum septimum birthday this Semiquincentennial year. This Wisconsin Yankee was born in the city that struck the first blow of a second American revolution, that of the Confederacy to break its bonds, Charleston, South Carolina. (I take full responsibility for incorrect Latin usage.)

At 66 my life has spanned a bit more than a quarter of the life of the United States! Conceived and born during the Eisenhower Administration, followed by administrations of Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, Bush II, Obama, Trump 1.0, Biden, and Trump 2.0. 13 presidents, 14 presidencies, about 25% of presidencies. I wonder how many more there will be before I pass.

I have always been proud to be a citizen of the United States even though I am not proud of everything that has been done in the name of, “We, the People of the United States.” We are neither spotless saints nor irredeemable sinners. We are the heirs of an unfinished revolution which requires us to always seek to, “in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” We are the ones who must make real the self-evident truths, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Philadelphia, 2026

My wife and I will fly to Philadelphia two weeks after I submit this to the anthology. This will be our third trip in two years to spend time with our daughter and son-in-law. We were going to schedule the visit to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Then we thought it better to go to Philly before the main festivities thinking that we can see more sites with fewer people about.

We look forward to seeing some of the best known sites and lesser known sites again. The one site that I plan to make an extended visit to is Washington Square to kneel and kiss the ground before the Tomb of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier. It is the one place that caused me to tear up during my first trip.

I recalled the Tomb today, Memorial Day, May 25, 2026. My dog, Eddie, and I were walking along Milton Creek on the former Boise paper mill property. We heard the rumble of Oregon Air National Guard F-15 Eagles. We did not see them. We did see a soaring bald eagle soaring above the forest canopy.

Patriotic Children's Bicycle Parade, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Two pictures of a boy with a summer butch haircut riding his bicycle.

One picture black and white from 66, the second in color from 67 (not 6-7!)

Crepe interwoven among the spokes, crepe streamers flow from the handlebars.

A cardboard figure with uplifted arms attached to the back fender one year, a flag flying extended from the handlebars the other.

For which did he receive the prize that he hoped would be a package of plastic green army men, but was instead a small envelope with 25 cents?

For which he was not unhappy. Candy was cheap back then.

Two Haiku

Liberty demands
Diversity, equity,
Inclusion for all.

Liberty defends
Diversity, equity,
Inclusion for all

Declaring Independence from Invasive Plants

Deep rooted invaders from the United Kingdom seek still to overrun our land: English holly, English ivy, Scotch Broom. You can learn about these and other invasives in Columbia County in the *Columbia County Field Guide for Noxious Weeds* (2019), authored by Thomas Kaye of the Institute for Applied Ecology and Crystalyn Bush of the Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District. More information is available at www.columbiaswcd.com.

Recommended Literature

These are the most memorable texts that have shaped my understanding of the significance of the *Declaration of Independence*:

Atkinson, R. (2019). *The British are coming: The war for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775–1777* (The Revolution Trilogy, Vol. 1). Henry Holt and Co.

Atkinson, R. (2025). *The fate of the day: The war for America, Fort Ticonderoga to Charleston, 1777–1780* (The Revolution Trilogy, Vol. 2). Crown.

Avi. (1984). *The fighting ground*. HarperCollins.

Chernow, R. (2004). *Alexander Hamilton*. Penguin Press.

Collier, J. L., & Collier, C. (1974). *My brother Sam is dead*. Scholastic.

Declaration of Independence (1776)

Ellis, J. J. (2025). *The great contradiction: The tragic side of the American founding*. Knopf.

Ferling, J. (2000). *Setting the world ablaze: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and the American Revolution*. Oxford University Press.

Forbes, E. (1943).

Johnny Tremain. Houghton Mifflin.

McCullough, D. (2005). *1776*. Simon & Schuster.

Paine, T. (1776). *Common sense*. W. & T. Bradford.

Philbrick, N. (2013). *Bunker Hill: A city, a siege, a revolution*. Penguin Books.

The Atlantic, Vol. 336-No. 5, November, 2025, *The unfinished revolution*.

A Must Grow Tomato

Brandywine tomatoes are an heirloom, beefsteak variety that take 80-100 days to mature.

Why include them in this piece? The Continental Army fought the British at Brandywine

Creek as they advanced toward Philadelphia in 1777. It was the largest battle of the

Revolutionary War. The British won the battle, capturing Philadelphia fifteen days later. The

date of the battle of Brandywine? 9-11-1777.

July 4, Columbia View Park

By Brandie Clark

I can count the number of 4th of July celebrations that I did not stand on the bank of the Columbia River watching the fireworks as a child. I don't remember any one person specifically being there or not being there. The long walk past parked cars and the struggle for space to set up chairs gave the impression that everyone was always there, except today. I have not observed the holiday here myself in over 15 years, yet I instinctually find my way directly to the roped off section of grass in the shadow of the historic courthouse. I glance across the water to the launch site of the fireworks on Sand Island. It feels like everyone is here again, passing the time until dark with hot dogs, Cool Ranch Doritos, Snapple, games, novelty fireworks, and laughter.

My son, alongside the son of one of my closest high school friends, provokes their younger sisters by throwing little white poppers at them. Our girls retaliate by returning fire with the paper balls that had failed to snap and pop in the grass where they sat whispering. "Can we have the sparklers now?" one of them begs. "Let's wait til dark. Why don't you see who else is over at the playstructure?" my friend urges. Our eyes meet and my eyebrows raise. The perpetrators meander off, probably already involved in some moments that induce the kind of secrets you hold for a lifetime.

Her youngest sits on a blanket at my feet, happily handing cookies from the oversized Tupperware bowl to the round grabby fingers of several other toddlers belonging to more of my childhood friends. I glance down at my watch and those of us inside the rope begin to gather together. The man next to me stands with one arm around his wife while bouncing his crying daughter up and down in the other. We wait above the flowing river and docked boats.

He still visits his parents in the house down the road from where I once lived. Growing up in our neighborhood, we were no strangers to sneaking out bedroom windows. Seemingly undercover, until that night when my girlfriend and I returned from a gathering at Trestle Beach to find my Dad sitting in the dark room. I've driven by the aging homes only once since graduation and my parents' divorce.

The intense, deep rumble in the distance sneaks up on me. My husband points to the sky, directing our children to look up. Four fighter jets appear almost from nowhere. One in the lead with the others trailing like a perfect formation of geese. I watch as they fly over before one turns sharply up and disappears. Tears drip from my chin as my daughter presses her fingers into her ears. The town falls silent as the sound reaches deep in their core. All eyes follow the smaller group of three remaining F-15s continuing their path overhead where they will eventually return to their station, minus one of their own from the Oregon Air National Guard's Redhawks.

The widow of the honored local pilot stands surrounded by us all, their baby nestled against her damp shirt. My husband clings to the sticky hand of their preschooler as he honors the man he aggressively played Hotel California on air guitar with at this same age. We have all stood and sat and questioned and cried at her side since the accident. No title captures the nature of this unconventional social alliance, but this group is fiercely loyal to those who came of age within its membership, along with those who married into it. Like the song, *"you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."*

Three lifelong friends stand shoulder to shoulder slowly returning their hats to their heads, allowing only the redhead on a Razor to divide them. Staring at the long gangway leading to the dock, I can still feel the pride of the boys wearing their team's baseball caps on Saturday morning, the freedom of the orange sunglasses flying off a teenage kneeboarder, and the mischievous smirks eyeing me over the bus seat. Stepping back from the pathway, the

shortest of the three men unexpectedly grabs at the closest arm to keep himself from falling backward over the open cooler. Eyes widen and drinks spill. “More please,” interrupts the sweet little boy with watermelon juice running down his chin, oblivious to the commotion he caused. Too young to understand the commemoration of his father’s last dogfight.

Several of us begin shuffling through bags and piles, searching for sweatshirts. Others begin pulling them over the windblown hair of tiring children. “It’s dark,” they say, prompting two Dads to pull boxes of fireworks from another bag. Each lights a punk and begins handing fire sticks to any small demanding hand. Sparks trail from spinning arms and the writing of names in the air. The older kids touch new to old, igniting their own sparklers. I zip my own sweatshirt then attempt to keep little hands and feet away from the flinging flames and hot wires littering the ground.

The encircled spouse of the fallen aviator from the 142nd Wing passes her warm baby to me. She efficiently peels the picnic-stained clothing from her preschooler, replacing them with red, white, and blue pajamas. Fluttering eyes look up at me then back to his Mommy. “It’s gonna be ok,” I whisper as the first squealy whirring trail makes its path over our heads.

I Hope We Remember

By Brenda Condelles

When the mayor shows up for an event in a small town, you know it's a big deal. At least it is when you're eleven years old in rural America. My heart swelled with pride the day they cut the red ribbon, revealing a Monument my dad and family friend, Peter, had spent over a year building.

Peter had become a Naturalized citizen of the United States after immigrating from Africa. He loved telling stories about his time growing up in Africa, his journey and beginnings in the U.S., and how he had finally become a permanent citizen after passing his Civics test. Peter was one of the proudest Americans I've ever known, and he deeply wanted to honor the veterans who had made it possible for him to pursue the American Dream.

My father, a once-gas-hauling truck driver who, when we made the big move to Idaho, had most recently turned into a farmhand, had always been a big deal to me. He could fix everything and tell me facts about anything under the sun, but my father was quiet. He didn't stand out in crowds. He went to work before I woke up and came home long after school and homework was done. But seeing him in his best, the only twenty-year-old suit he owned, combed hair, and scrubbed fingernails standing behind that red ribbon, on the edge of the Snake River Canyon, made me think that this monument was so much more than concrete and a metal plaque.

That was the first time in my life I had thought deeply about and appreciated my country. I thought about the Veterans we were there to honor on that hot July day. I listened to speeches and saw the men and women in uniforms, clad with medals and ribbons. I could not fathom at the time, nor even now, the enormity of the events that took place during each

veteran's service to earn the medals that adorned their uniforms. Pieces of metal and ribbon, which could never properly convey or give justice to what they gave to bear them.

Today, in the 250th year of the United States of America, I think of the sacrifices made through the generations by not only the service members, but the families who have supported them, and endured the costs emotionally and physically. None of us can be an American and not have some proxy to another American who has served our country.

I have ancestors who fought in some of the earliest American Wars. Both my grandfathers served in World War II. One was a Navy man and a first-generation Czech in the U.S., and the other was a German translator for the Army at Roswell, New Mexico, throughout the 1940s. However, his heritage goes much further back into early America. There was my uncle, who served in Vietnam. My godfather was a Marine, an honorable man to this day. And the fathers of two of my sisters' children both served in the Iraq War.

I think of my grandfather and how he used to sing lullabies in Czech to me and the other grandkids and inevitably swear in a language none of us could understand. I also think about my earliest immigrant ancestors, people who came here as early as the 1700s and 1800s and witnessed the birth and growth of this Nation, and those who came as late as the 1910s. People from England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, what was once Czechoslovakia, and who knows even further back, gentrified to the point where I am beyond recognition as one of their daughters—ancestors whose bones and blood are here for many generations back. I try to remember them when my hands turn the soil on the little sliver of Earth I'm currently the steward of.

Goodness knows, so much of my ancestry is as much hearsay as anyone else's, verified as best as can be by ancestry records in the age of the internet. What I really am is a person who is lucky enough to be here right now during the 250th anniversary of this great Nation.

I hope that in the years to come, we remember that we are America the beautiful, land of the free and the home of the brave.

We are the folks who have built every building, bridge, and road, work in every field, plant every seed, and pick every strawberry. Those who dared to imagine humans traveling faster than a horse, in the sky with the birds, and in outer space.

Those who insist on peace and prosperity, and those willing to die to give it to the rest of us. The brave who not only defend her, but also those men and women and children who have come here against all odds, past and present, across oceans, through deserts, over mountains, babies on their backs, toddlers in tow, over thousands of miles.

The Indigenous Nations of North America who fed and sheltered the first immigrants to this continent. Who changed the course of world history during World War II. The Indigenous people who have lived and died through every moment of this country's history, and who continue to bear immeasurable sacrifice for the country we are celebrating. May we remember them in the past and honor them in the present.

What will we look like in another 50, 100, 250 years? I don't know any more than the founders could have imagined on July 4, 1776. But what they imagined was a Nation of free people who possess inalienable rights like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They insisted on a government that derives its legitimacy only from the people it governs.

But why does any of that matter? I am a witness to the grit in our people. It is a grit we share. Whether you have ancestry traced to the beginning of our Nation, or you are a new citizen, there is a reason we are all here, why we all want to be here, together in the same place with shared hopes and dreams for the future. The enormity of love, loss, sacrifice, and cost is beyond my ability and the scope of this anthology to convey.

I hope that we remember all the people who are America. Let us never forget all who have served to defend the freedoms that set us apart from any other nation, all who have built

the places we love, those who were stewards of the land through time immemorial, our neighbors, our families and friends, and the many who will continue to make this nation a place of peace, ingenuity, and a beacon of light through future generations.

Freedom Haikus

By Mike Exinger

A patriot votes.
Ensuring democracy.
Involved and informed.

Liberty for all.
Not just for some or many,
But for everyone.

It's we the people
Making this country awesome
by working as one.

Bombs bursting in air!
Say, is it Fort McHenry?
No, just my neighbor.

Indivisible.
One nation with liberty
and justice for all.

Resilient—E Pluribus Unum

By Mike Exinger

The reason we should make a big deal of America being 250 years old isn't that 250 years is a long time for a country to exist. There are plenty of other places in this world that are much, much older. No, "America 250" is worth a shout-out because of everything we've been through (including the self-inflicted wounds).

Think about it: wars, both internal and external. Boom times and busts: depressions, recessions, and panics galore; western expansion (from sea to shining sea) and massive immigration until thirteen states were fifty. Technological and innovative wizardry: telegraph, radio, telephone, television, movies, computers, nuclear energy, and the Internet. Social upheavals: slavery, civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, Native American rights, and economic inequality. And many other challenges to what's supposed to be our unalienable rights for "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

It seems that every time America's moxie is tested, we somehow find it in ourselves to get back on track and move forward. Sometimes it's a grassroots effort from the bottom up, sometimes it comes from great leadership. Sometimes it takes a major change—there have been twenty-seven amendments to the U.S. Constitution (and more than 11,000 failed attempts). In these last 250 years, we've not only maintained our standing but also improved upon it.

When the rest of the world thinks of the American dream, they think of a land of superior economic, educational, and professional opportunities. They've come to count on the U.S. to defend freedom and democracy around the world. They believe this because we did it, both in war and in peacetime.

And we did it because we remembered what our early national motto is all about. E Pluribus Unum (Out of Many, One) initially represented the thirteen colonies coming together to form one nation. It also signifies that our diversity is our strength—out of different voices, different backgrounds, different experiences, different cultures, and different lifestyles, we can come together to be as one; stronger, dynamic, resilient, and ready, in the words of JFK, to “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.”

May we find the strength to continue.

So, What Could Be More American Than an American Sentence? Patriotism, Education, and Humor from Buxton Manning

By Mike Exinger writing as Buxton Manning

If the haiku is the traditional form of short Japanese poetry focusing on nature, imagery, or a specific moment in time, is there a similar American style?

Why yes. Yes, there is.

Beat poet Allen Ginsberg was inspired by the haiku, with its three lines of traditionally 5-7-5 syllables, and invented the “American Sentence,” a single sentence of 17 syllables. As explained in his biography on the AllenGinsberg.org website, Ginsberg’s work was based on the notion that one’s individual thoughts and experiences resonated among the masses. “It occurs to me that I am America,” Ginsberg wrote, and while the statement was intended to be humorous, it also illustrated his idea that democracy begins with the raising of a single voice.

So, rather than a haiku to celebrate America 250 (a specific moment in time), why not raise my voice in an American Sentence? Better yet, why not find a sentence already written by some famous American that’s already an American Sentence? I mean, wouldn’t it be cool to discover that someone like Thomas Jefferson or George Washington uttered such a phrase even before the concept was conceived?

I thought so because that’s how my mind works. The thing is, our Founding Fathers were wordy dudes. Take the start¹ of the Declaration of Independence:

¹ It’s actually the second paragraph of the Declaration—the first paragraph is also all one sentence and runs eighty-one words!

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty² and the pursuit of Happiness.

That's thirty-five words, man, and there's no need to count syllables.

What about the start of the Constitution?

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence [sic], promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Nuh-uh. Fifty-two words, and yes, "defence" is spelled correctly. The way we do it here now—defense—didn't change until around the 1820s. Let's get a bit more modern and check Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, famous for its brevity:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

A little better at thirty words, but not what we're looking for. At least he used commas correctly. Oh, I know—the Pledge of Allegiance!

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Nope, too long again at thirty-one words. But wait—this isn't the original version!

What about that?

I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one

² And notice how those naughty Almost-Americans disregard the need for the very proper English "Oxford comma" here?

nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Shorter, at twenty-two words, but still way more syllables, and nowhere close to our target of seventeen. How about an actual poem? I'm thinking of "The New Colossus," the famous sonnet written by Emma Lazarus to help fund the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. A plaque with the poem was added to the base of the statue years later, and while it's not at the beginning, the part we all remember is this:

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*

In its entirety, it's too long, but the first part is spot on, seventeen syllables!

*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe
free = 17!*

OK, I cheated a little. Encouraged by this, I went deeper into my hunt and found this famous quote from Nathan Hale, uttered on the gallows before he was hanged for treason during the Revolutionary War. (which was actually never verified, but we all think he said it):

I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.

As a young boy, I vividly remember the short tenure of our youngest president, John F. Kennedy, and his infamous inaugural address quote:

*Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your
country.*

So close at nineteen syllables. But I found another, less famous quote of his:

A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on.

I guess it's hard to get it exact when you're not trying. So, I tried my hand at it and came up with these:

Every valid American citizen deserves the right to vote.

America is strongest when its citizens are well educated.

You cannot be a true patriot without listening to others.

The motto "E Pluribus Unum"—Latin for "out of many, one."

It's fun, it's (relatively) easy, and we could teach it in the schools.

Hey, that's seventeen syllables, too!

PS: So were the title and subtitle of this essay!

Where I Come From...

By Kristen Fung

A two part poem created from the words of children.

Part 1: Where do Pre-K kids come from?

Where we come from is beautiful and diverse,
Full of people, places, and things to put into verse.
We come from stories about dinosaurs, princesses, unicorns, and animals
under the sea.
And from watching famous faces like Sponge Bob, Spiderman, and of
course Barbie.
We come from monster trucks.
We come from fire trucks.
We come from electric cars that go Eeeeeeeee.
We come from tractors in the country, and bright lights in the city.
Classes for taekwondo and classes for ballet.
And spending time with our families each and every day.
We come from pick-ups with grandparents, sisters and brothers big and
small.
Running with Dad, shopping with mom,
And playing with school friends short and tall.
We come from speeding on bikes and swimming in pools.
We come from rainy days and rainbows,
And weekend trips to the Oregon Zoo.
We come from hot bowls of ramen, bean burritos, bananas, mangoes,
and gummies of all different shapes.
We come from homes with pets like dogs, cats, birds, frogs, and even
snakes.
We come from different languages, different cultures, different beliefs,
and different loves,
But we all come together, under one flag of stars and stripes,
here in America.

Part 2: Where do Preschoolers come from?

Where we come from is a place like none other.
Where different peoples come together, embracing one another.
We come from grandma's treasured recipes and salty McDonald's fries.
We come from new experiences and old traditions, existing side by side.
We come from favorite colors like lime green, dark green, brown,
purple, and pink.
From reading books with sisters and brothers,
And helping Mom with dishes in the sink.
We come from Minecraft. We come from stuffys.
We come from camping and animal tracks; Band-aids, and rainbows, and
dogs with names like Max.
We come from popcorn on Fridays, riding scooters, and playing Mario
with Dad.
Hugs and kisses from family whenever we feel sad.
We come from Dinosaurs, and unicorns, and a hungry caterpillar.
We come from Teslas and Monsters trucks, tractors, and earth movers.
We come from eating chicken, bananas, popsicles, and chocolate ice
cream—
And
vanilla!
And
strawberry!
And
birthday cake dreams!
We come from Spider-Man pajamas.
And pink and blue cat key chains.
We come from books, and movies, and singing in the rain.
We were born in different places, some near and some far,
Bringing likes and dislikes unique to who we are.
But we come together under a flag of red, white, and blue.
We come together in America—Free to be ourselves.
Free to be me and you.

Still

By Sharon Hughson

Tears threaten every time I hear “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Every. Single. Time.

I am on my feet. My hand covers my heart.

Maybe the strength of emotion comes because I swore an oath to protect America.

Then I pulled on my U.S. Army uniform and snapped a salute to the red, white, and blue.

This mama who wore combat boots instead of heading to college believes America is synonymous with freedom.

Still.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, colonists chose to revolt against their king and threw off the yoke of a rule that ignored their voices. Their choice cost the blood of thousands.

Blood is a steep price. But those early patriots believed their freedom to self-govern was worth it. They declared independence and met on the battlefield to win it. Yes, winning liberty often requires a fight.

America: home of the free *because* of the brave.

Freedom is never free. Once we start believing it is—and is ours by right—its value diminishes. True liberty is unselfish. It recognizes the cost associated with choices.

Not every act committed in the name of freedom reflects liberty’s true nature. Not when bombs are dropped for indiscernible reasons, or rioters break windows, loot businesses, and burn our sense of safety to the ground.

I’ve never stood in the line of fire. But I’d be willing to. Most people would jump in front of a speeding car to shove their child out of harm’s way.

But who would do that for a stranger?

U.S. Servicemen and women. Police officers. Firefighters. And others who, every day, choose to value someone else's safety over their own. That's authentic liberty wearing skin.

Sacrifice alone cannot sustain freedom. Liberty also depends on something less visible but perhaps more necessary: justice.

We've come to believe that freedom means doing whatever we want. Even something that's against the law. Even if it hurts other people. But that is not liberty. That's selfishness masquerading as liberty.

There can be liberty and justice for all. But only if a standard of justice remains intact.

Justice isn't a chameleon. There are laws. There are penalties for breaking them. There are people who enforce them and those who debate and defend them in a courtroom. A just system makes no distinction among lawbreakers. Brown or white, the same standard of law must apply to both.

Justice carries out the sentence when laws are broken. If a man beats another man to death, the color of their skin makes no difference to Lady Justice. She weighs the circumstances in her balances, and the hammer falls on the wrongdoer.

Should people in positions of authority be held to a higher standard? Perhaps. Or perhaps the highest standard should be an honor to keep. When any person makes an exception for their brother or friend, that is not justice.

Lady Justice holds her measuring stick at the level of the law. Those who can't meet its requirements face a penalty. The punishment must suit the crime. But the lawbreaker shouldn't be given special consideration for anything except proven and documented mental illness.

But let's be honest, reality doesn't meet this ideal. Systems fail the people they are meant to protect. I saw this firsthand while serving in the military.

I will not raise my hand with the #MeToo movement. But I recall standing in front of one of the drill instructors near the end of my basic training. He all but asked me to sleep with him.

And he wasn't the only man of higher rank to do so while I served.

Where were justice and accountability then?

Not present and accounted for. But that didn't stop me from believing in justice for all. Instead, it emphasized the necessity of such a belief. A justice applied intermittently is no justice at all.

Which illuminates another uncomfortable truth: Justice requires consequences.

Liberty belongs to those who walk according to the law. Which is why incarceration—the retraction of physical freedom—serves as a primary punishment for lawbreakers.

Prisoners should mourn the loss of freedom. That mourning should turn their thoughts inward. Reflection on the actions that placed bars around them should naturally follow.

Why is admitting our mistakes and accepting the natural consequences so difficult?

I asked myself that question often while working in the public school system.

I believe everyone is entitled to an education. But standing between a student who was a foot taller than me and outweighed me by seventy-five pounds—and what he thought he should be able to do—made me quiver. He could have mowed me down. It was my job to keep him safe and at school.

A fellow employee told me she would have let him go. And a few weeks later he did go—back to the juvenile detention center.

Too many blame others—even the system. Their mistake was because of how they were raised. Or because they grew up in harsh conditions. They didn't have enough to eat.

They weren't offered the same opportunities. But self-justification is often the opposite of justice.

Personal responsibility is unpopular these days. Earlier generations understood the concept differently.

Many believe the draft was unconstitutional. My stepfather's number came up in 1966, and he went to Vietnam in a U.S. Army uniform. His country asked it of him. So he went.

When he married my mother in the late 1980s, he still spent some nights back in those jungles, waking in a sweat, a shout on his lips. No one had thanked him. He did his duty and that was enough.

The rights secured by the U.S. Constitution come with responsibilities. Too many want the prize without carrying the weight.

Sadly, the United States isn't united. Many political and ideological claims clash and those who support them take sides against each other. Against unity. Many people fear the division is permanent because the beliefs of the right contradict those of the left. No bridge exists between them. Each side touts acceptance while remaining wholly intolerant of the other.

Agree to disagree? That seems impossible. Especially when media stirs every ember of resentment and contention into a conflagration. When people struggle to find accurate news. And biased or partial accounts are passed off as truth.

And that is why "with liberty and justice for all" erodes. There is no true freedom without active participation in citizenship.

When I compare our present moment to my childhood memories, the difference is a vast canyon. America at 250 seems nearly unpatriotic beside the colors flown at its bicentennial.

I know. I was there.

In 1976, every classroom started its school day the same way. Hand over heart, every voice in unison reciting the Pledge, the flag standing sentry at the front of the room.

By the time I went to work at the local middle school in the early 2000s, things had changed. On Monday mornings, the principal made announcements and then invited students to say the Pledge with her. I stood, my hand over my heart.

Half the classroom stayed seated. Scattered voices rang hollow.

Had it really come to this?

Old Glory waved, endorsing the freedom these students exercised to bow out of this timeless tradition. I wanted them to stand in honor of that. After all, that flag represented the liberty permitting them to abstain from repeating words my heart held so dear.

Lady Liberty stands at the gateway to New York harbor. Her torch offers light to those fleeing darkness, while the tablet of law rests against her breast. Liberty cannot stand alone; she depends on her sister Lady Justice to stand beside her.

Our nation once symbolized liberty: a republic where men and women believed in something better and put their lives on the line to secure it. A nation without a king. A place with free elections, giving every citizen a voice in its government.

America was founded on the idea that human dignity and self-governance are worth dying for. That history doesn't belong to one group. It belongs to every person who chooses to be American—who accepts its responsibilities alongside its rights.

Religious freedom. Free speech. Equal protection under the law. Soldiers fought for these in 1776, and soldiers today still carry them forward.

But somewhere between now and then, we forgot the cost.

We stopped acting like people who earned liberty and started acting like we were owed it. But freedom has never been free, and it has never been passive. It demands something of us.

I put my hand over my heart. I swore an oath. I pulled on that uniform and saluted the red, white, and blue.

I still stand when the anthem plays. I always will.

Lady Justice, Lady Liberty, will you still stand tall in America at the tricentennial?

Only if the free are brave enough to stand for liberty—and justice—for all.

Skinned Knees, Bee Stings

By Remy Icenogle

There is something to be said about Main Street Pizza—the salad bar, the breadsticks, the crunchy, dill pickles—how you’re only allowed once through but Mom stacks up her bowl enough to feed us all. The baby corn that you can’t manage to eat ‘cause it doesn’t feel right somehow.

If you’ve lived here long enough, you remember the Bill’s Kwik Video and Tanning, the little palm-tree stickers that you’d put on your stomach before laying on the cold, plastic bed that lit up too bright and took too long to get warm. The scary little eye covers—neon pink.

You know about the original Starkiss—the grape star, leaving your mouth stained with purple dye.

You know about the two old playgrounds that were at the old Otto Petersen Elementary—one for the 4th graders and another for the older kids. You know about the tetherball lines and “bubbling.” You remember there was that one tall kid who no one wanted to go against because he’d get you out in one serve—the skinny rope wrapped choke-tight around the metal pole.

Blistered hands, skinned knees, bee stings.

Giant dirt mounds along Davona Dr. before the houses went in—we played “house” and kicked out stairs in the dust.

“Wish” flowers blown out across grass fields with crossed fingers in hopes Mom would say yes to the sleepover.

Streetlight clocks and saltwater sandals. Neighborhood basketball games. Riding bikes to Kim's Video—if you saved nine receipts, you'd get the tenth movie free! Styrofoam helmets with blue flames.

The excitement over now having to dial the area code!

American Idol on Tuesday nights with burnt popcorn and sliced, green apples on a stained cutting board.

Denim couches with oversized pillows.

Carole's Place—if you know, you know.

Walking to school and feeling safe. Oldsmobiles with scratchy, blue interior. Sheryl Crow on CD. Gel pens. TGIF on ABC. Y2K parties because the world was going to end at midnight and maybe it's better to perish with friends wearing party hats.

Riding bikes, playing Snail, mastering cursive in 3rd grade.

A brief Dollar Tree experience by Ixtapa where you'd buy sparkly, green eyeshadow and regret it later.

The mini-golf place—fighting with your sister over the purple golf ball. Getting ice cream after. Watching it get overgrown with blackberry brambles and then get eaten down by goats. A roadside spectacle.

Chicken strips and “jojos” with ranch for the lunch special at JJ's Marketplace during off-campus lunch.

Crimping our hair and rollerblading down the ramp at the middle school.

Watching the population grow, the welcome sign change. What happened to the pool? We saved for that for ages!

Like I said, there's something to be said about the salad bar. Something to be said about all of what used to be. Something to be remembered.

A Descendant's Lament

By Ellen Jacobson

Few in number are those countries which came into existence without bloodshed. For some it was a peaceful transition from colonial status into nationhood, as in the case of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Mauritius. For others it was an amicable “divorce” or “dissolution,” as with the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the formation of post-Soviet era nations. Diplomatic negotiations garnered many Pacific and Caribbean islands their independence.

The United States of America is not one of these. Like the majority of humanity's attempts to declare their sovereignty over a defined territory and exert their rights to control their own politico-economic spheres, our nation was forged through warfare.

The first of these was the Revolutionary War which began in 1775 and continued until 1783 when the British monarchy acknowledged our independence, and our nationhood was assured.

The second of these was the American Civil War, when our country was fractured into two. From 1861 to 1865, we fought against each other, countless souls were lost, and ultimately our nation was preserved.

My ancestors took part in both of these wars, but it's the Civil War ancestor, David Gifford Chadwick (1814-1908), that strikes a chord with me. Perhaps because it is closer in time. Perhaps because of our current political landscape. Or maybe simply because I've seen his picture hanging in the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

My great-great-great grandfather was a whaling captain and one of the Commanders of the Stone Fleet, a failed Union blockade of the entrance to the Charleston Harbor in South Carolina.

The United States Navy purchased a fleet of twenty-four aging ships (mostly whaleships) in New Bedford, Massachusetts. These ships were “worn, wrinkled, and obsolete” as Herman Melville tells us in his poem, “An Old Sailor’s Lament,” but they had one last duty to serve—taking part in the war effort.

Before their departure, holes were drilled in each ship, then temporarily plugged. Their hulls were filled with granite stones, gravel, and dirt so they would sink when later scuttled, thus impeding blockade runners who were supplying the Confederacy.

Helmed by whaling captains, the fleet set sail on November 20, 1861 on a one way passage to the ancient vessels’ intended watery graves. However, some vessels sank along the way. A decision was taken to sink near Tybee Island in Georgia to serve as a wharf for the landing of Union troops. This was the fate of the *South America*, the 606-ton whaleship commanded by Captain Chadwick.

The remaining ships sailed onward to Charleston where they were scuttled in a failed effort to block the main shipping channel. With some vessels sunk too deep and others sunk too far apart from each other, navigation was hardly hindered. Tidal currents soon swept the once great ships away.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee described the Stone Fleet’s blockade as unworthy of any nation and as “the abortive expression of the malice and revenge of a people . . . It is also indicative of their despair of ever capturing a city they design to ruin.” Lee correctly deduced from the Union’s efforts that they did not intend to attack Charleston, and instead he prepared for assaults elsewhere.

Only a small number of countries have remained intact for over 250 years. Will the United States of America continue as “one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all” for the next 250 years without another civil war? What laments will our descendants inherit—and what stories will they tell?

“An Old Sailor’s Lament” by Herman Melville (1861)

I have a feeling for those ships,
Each worn and ancient one,
With great bluff bows, and broad in the beam;
Ay, it was unkindly done.
But so they serve the Obsolete—Even so, Stone Fleet!

You'll say I'm doting; do but think
I scudded round the Horn in one—
The Tenedos, a glorious
Good old craft as ever run—Sunk (how all unmeet!)
With the Old Stone Fleet.

An India ship of fame was she,
Spices and shawls and fans she bore;
A whaler when her wrinkles came—
Turned off! till, spent and poor,
Her bones were sold (escheat)!
Ah! Stone Fleet.

Four were erst patrician keels
(Names attest what families be),
The Kensington, and Richmond too,
Leonidas, and Lee:
But now they have their seat
With the Old Stone Fleet.

To scuttle them—a pirate deed—Sack them, and dismast;
They sunk so slow, they died so hard,
But gurgling dropped at last.
Their ghosts in gales repeat
Woe's us, Stone Fleet!

And all for naught. The waters pass—
Currents will have their way;
Nature is nobody's ally; 'tis well;
The harbor is bettered—will stay.
A failure, and complete,
Was your Old Stone Fleet.

“A Descendant’s Lament” by Ellen Jacobson (2026)

I have a feeling for those men,
Ancestors so proud and sure,
With great strides, they prepared their strikes.
Ay, they were righteous and *de jure*,
But still, their hearts did shake,
Even so, they served the States.

You’ll say I’m fickle; do but think
I do not know of what is right.
Acts of war, so many souls to heaven borne,
When nations exercise their might.
Yet here I stand,
With the States.

A captain famous for his ship,
Stones and gravel and dirt she bore,
Destined to sink beneath the sea.
Was it just? Was it right?
One will never know, you see,
For the blockade, it was not achieved.
Ah! The States.

82 Years Since the Fall of The Atlantic Wall: An Event Known as D-Day

By Marc Knutson

By the summer of 1944, the goose-stepping boot of Nazi Germany was squarely secured on the necks of the capitulating Western European nations. The Nazi war machine had rolled across the continent, blasting and bombing its will on weaker foes. Not stopping until it claimed nation after nation in the name of the Fatherland. The Chancellor of Germany, Adolph Hitler, consciously, purposely, and effectively worked his way to the Dictator of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, otherwise known as the Nazi Party.

His vision was to rule the world, taken by the force of his military might, and in the process, purge Germany of both Jews and Communists, both of which he held in disdain. From the beginning, the September 1939 invasion and conquest of Poland, the Nazi's military might appeared formidable enough to accomplish the Führer's vision of being the Monarch of Europe, and eventually – the world.

Nothing short of an allied invasion could dislodge the concrete tentacles so literally entrenched deep in French, Belgian, and German soils. The Atlantic Wall, a 2,400-mile fortification of concrete bunkers, gun turrets, and land mines, was the immediate object in the Allies' way.

America, up to this point, had held herself out of the European fray in efforts to remain neutral as a result of the Neutrality Act of 1939, an Act that prevented the United States from entering the war. Although, while not sending troops, the U.S. was able to help support the war effort for Great Britain and France, through supplies of war implements on a

‘Cash and carry’ basis. Meaning, the U.S. would assist its allies if the allies ‘purchased’ the equipment as the Neutrality Act allowed and called for.

However, the events of Sunday, December 7th, 1941, changed everything. As President Roosevelt tagged it “A Day that will live in infamy,” the attack by the Japanese Imperial forces on the placid, sleepy military installation of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, drew the U.S. into the war that it was hoping to avoid. On December 11th, four days after the declaration of war by the U.S. on the Japanese Empire, both Italy and Germany declared war on the U.S., thereby completing the triad Axis of Power, conspiring to rule the universe. Three nations at war with the world.

Enter the United States.

With the Neutrality Act in the rearview mirror and a Congressional declaration of war, the U.S. military establishment began mobilizing troops, equipment, and financing for a massive war effort that would be spread across the globe on several fronts.

On the Pacific front, the SPTO (South Pacific Theater of Operations) America began island-hopping campaigns with forces of the Army, Marines, and Naval air, land, and sea assets, to reclaim, or redeem, properties and territories that had been invaded and occupied by the Imperial forces of Japan.

Island by island, working its way from the South Pacific, to the ultimate targets of Iwo Jima, Okinawa and ultimately Japan itself, the American Army, led by General Douglas MacArthur, and the U.S. Navy, led by Admiral Chester Nimitz, rolled out campaigns that included invasions of the properties by landing forces on the beaches, to take the properties acre, by acre.

On the Atlantic front, known as the ETO (the European Theater of Operations), bombing missions using B-17 and B-24 bombers were launched from air bases in England, across the channel to targets in France, and eventually, Germany itself. As bombing missions

increased, taking out German manufacturing factories and plants manufacturing war implements, a certain vulnerability began to reveal itself to the leadership of the self-proclaimed Third World Empire, known to themselves as The Third Reich. At one point, there was an air of arrogant invincibility, postured by German military leaders. Their noses in the air, pompousness puffing about the ultimate and impending crush of the American and her allies' grip on the world.

Enter Operation Overlord.

Amassing troops, ships, tanks, planes, gliders, and other war apparatus in England, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the ETO, had his staff prepare a plan for the invasion of Europe. 'Operation Overlord' was the code name for the campaign to liberate Europe from the death grip of Adolph Hitler, the Nazi Party and the self-proclaimed Third Reich.

On the morning of June 5th, 1944, the anticipation grew among the troops, sailors, and airmen; was this the day to land in France? Was this the day that they had spent months training for, spent thousands on being equipped for, and spent hours praying for divine help for? No, frustratingly and relieving at the same time, it was not just yet. Weather across the channel created a shipping hazard with high winds and waves. Seasickness on the English Channel waters was prolific in normal weather, but the swells this day would have defeated the warriors before they arrived on the beaches of Normandy.

June 6th, 1944, at 6:30 am, the command went forth to begin the largest invasion force the world had ever seen in earthly history. The British and Canadian forces aimed their landing craft at three separate beaches along the Normandy shores, named Juno, Gold, and Sword. In the meantime, American forces pointed their crafts toward Omaha and Utah beaches. The American forces lost over 2,000 troops on Omaha Beach alone. Statistically, 156,000 troops landed on the beaches; most of that total was comprised of American forces.

As the liberating armies continued to move inland and take territory back, little by little, the landings on the beaches of Normandy continued for 30 more days, bringing men, ammunition, and additional supplies, until June 30, 1944, the 'Official' ending date of the D-Day invasion. And the demise of the formidable 'Atlantic Wall'.

Eighty-two years have elapsed since those terrifying moments in the early hours of June 6th, 1944. Many of the men who braved those beaches, with the heavy enemy resistance, have since passed away, but the history and the memories have not. This year, we celebrate the bravery, the tenacity, and the sheer guts 82 years after they demonstrated those traits on a sandy beach, so far away in miles, but so close in remembrance.

Memorial Day—Why Remember?

By Marc Knutson

Passing through the town of Colleville-sur-Mer, you'll make a left turn off Highway D-514, onto Route du Cimetiere Americaine. One of 14 such cemeteries in the world.

In about half a mile, you'll find yourself passing through the gate that is identified as the "Normandy American Cemetery". A hedgerow of Austrian Pines escorts you to the cemetery's main entrance. All the while, as you walk across the parking lot, an unfamiliar feeling of foreboding fills the air, alerting your senses. The soberness that envelopes you in that moment is an emotion that you haven't felt in a long while.

Within moments, turning past the hedgerow, the cemetery comes into view, and the very explanation of the heaviness in the air is revealed. In one panoramic and breathtaking view, the entire one hundred and seventy-two acres of white marble headstones, memorial walls, reflection pools, and manicured lawns overwhelm all your senses. This is the memorable sight that defines what Memorial Day is all about. A beautiful monument to the men and women who had fallen in battle for the cause of liberty from tyranny and freedom from a potential global dictatorship.

What is amazing at first glance is the precise architecture and symmetry of the memorials' headstone markers. No matter what angle you look at them, their rows are aligned. Not one is out of plumb or askew. Along with the finely cropped lawn and the carefully trimmed trees and bushes, it is obvious that the care for the cemetery speaks to the honor and respect owed to, and demonstrated for, those interred on those sacred grounds. While the land itself remains officially French territory, the French government has granted use of this land, as a memorial cemetery, in perpetuity and without cost. Many French

citizens solemnly muse, upon passing through the gates of the memorial that they should provide their passports as they are entering, as it were, the United States' 51st state.

The panoply of 9,387 white marble crosses, and a mixing of white marble Stars of David, almost instantly squeeze your tear ducts. Not all the dead are from the D-Day battles; some are from other war-related causes and campaigns. Over to the West, nearly overlooking Omaha Beach, is the Wall of the Missing, memorializing 1,557 service men and women whose bodies were never recovered. Included on that wall are the names of 750 American soldiers aboard a troop transport ship headed to Normandy from England when it was torpedoed by a German submarine on Christmas Eve, 1944.

But, stand by with the tears, because in a few moments, you are about to place your hand over your heart as you hear the Star-Spangled Banner playing and you feel one more tug on your heart, and, if you stay at the cemetery long enough, your last bastion of resistance of emotion is about to succumb as 'Taps' plays its mournful dirge. Recommendation: Have a tissue or two standing by.

Meanwhile, back in the States, tradition has it that Memorial Day triggers several events, like the "official" start of summer, backyard BBQs, camping trips, and family time. But what gets lost in that scramble is the meaning of the 'why' of Memorial Day.

Memorial Day is designated a National Holiday to commemorate, honor, and mourn the men and women who have died in the line of duty in service to their country. Historically, it claims to have a variety of original roots and has created some controversy. Starting back around the time of the American Civil War, it was then dubbed 'Decoration Day', as both the North and the South wanted to honor and mourn their war dead. However, the first National observance began on May 30th, 1868. And, until 1971, it was observed on May 30th of every year. In 1971, it was officially moved to the last Monday in May.

But ‘why’ do we need memorials and special days set aside to remind us to honor and mourn? In short, here’s why: human nature is such that, as science has verified, over time, we tend to forget events, dates, and data. The opposite of the classic ‘learning curve’ when learning a new task or procedure, is countered by something called the ‘forgetting curve’. With passing time, and filling our memories with new data, coupled with anxiety about the present or future, events get pushed to the back of the line with the ‘forgetting curve’ hypothesis. That’s why we need to designate annual events like Memorial Day to bring back to our remembrance that the lives sacrificed should not have been in vain, to prevent them from slipping into the grip of the forgetting curve.

Keep in mind that it is never wrong to thank a veteran for their service to our blessed country. However, that’s what Armed Forces Day in May and Veterans Day in November are set aside for. Memorial Day is to honor, mourn, and pay tribute to those who’ve lost their lives in war for our country.

While America celebrates the start of summer with BBQs, parties, boating, and family picnics, take some time in that activity to gather the family and friends around and observe a moment of silence in memory of those who fought and paid, as they say, the ultimate price. Not just for those in Normandy or Pearl Harbor or Verdun or Hanoi or Fallujah - but for all our fallen men and women of uniform who, through bravery and personal sacrifice, raised their right hands and spoke a vow to defend our country, and will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Memorial Day brings back to our remembrance the lives that have gone before, honoring their pledge to defend and protect the Constitution of the United States, and perished in doing so. In turn, we honor them!

In the memorable words of General Eisenhower, speaking at a ceremony honoring those fallen in the war, including those in the Normandy American Cemetery, he eloquently said:

“To these, we owe the high resolve that the cause for which they died, shall live.”

The Great Potato Salad Show-Down of 1976

By Jana Mann

I've been pondering America 250 and my mind insisted on wandering down Memory Lane, specifically to the Independence Day subdivision. Like all holidays during childhood, Independence Day had its own traditions - parade in the morning, big family barbeque at lunch, and fireworks after dark. But it was different with the Bicentennial celebrations of 1976. Everything was extra patriotic, extra festive, extra grand.

The post-parade family barbeque is what stands out most in my mind. A veritable summertime feast! Dad ran the grill, burning up hot dogs and hamburgers. Mom's enormous fresh fruit salad was always served up in a hollowed-out watermelon. Creamsicles afterwards, melting almost too fast to eat. Of all the tasty goodness, my most favorite, the star of the show, was Grandma's potato salad.

On the 4th of '76, more families than usual planned to come eat after the parade, so that meant more food than usual, too. The tables groaned under the weight of such a potluck. Folks were loading up their paper plates, chatting about marching bands and rodeo royalty when it happened. The "other" potato salad was discovered on the table.

It was generally understood that Grandma's salad, always served up in the giant yellow bowl, was "the best" potato salad of all time. No one else ever brought it to a family event. The potato salad domain was hers and hers alone - until that fateful day.

Side by side on the table, the two salads matched up. The other potato salad had black olives and red onions in it. And it was made with little red potatoes. Grandma's was topped with slices of hard-boiled eggs and a sprinkle of paprika. She always used Russet potatoes.

With all the gravitas of a United Nations negotiator, Dad said, “I’m going to try some of this new potato salad.”

When everything was said and done and eaten, Grandma’s potato salad was completely gone and the bowl scraped clean. Not so for the other salad. In fact, whoever brought it didn’t even bother to take it home.

In honor of the Potato Salad Show-Down, here is Grandma’s recipe:

1. Wash 5 lbs of Russet potatoes. Trim off any eyes. Boil whole in salted water until tender. Take them out of the water, cool until able to handle, then peel and dice into a big bowl.
2. At the same time, hard-boil a dozen eggs. Peel, cut in half, and pop the yolks into a bowl. Dice the whites and add to the potatoes. Save a few slices for decoration.
3. Add salt, pepper, and onion powder to taste. Stir gently so the potatoes don’t mash up.
4. Mash the yolks in the bowl. Add in about 2 cups of Miracle Whip, ½ cup of white sugar, 1 good squirt of regular mustard, a couple of tablespoons of apple cider vinegar and the same of dill pickle juice, and about ¼ cup of canned milk. Stir all together and pour over the eggs and potatoes. If the potatoes are still a little warm, that’s even better. Mix well and taste.
5. Add more seasoning if needed. Put egg slices on top and a few dashes of paprika.
6. Eat right then or cover it and put it in the fridge until ready to serve.

History of Mount St. Helens Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution

By Colleen Menze and Teresa Maloney

In 1890 four committed ladies joined to establish the Daughters of the American Revolution on October 13. Our founders were Eugenia Washington, Mary Desha, Ellen Hardin Wallworth, and Mary Smith Lockwood. By 1895 our National Building was built at 1776 “D” Street in Washington, D.C. We are committed to Patriotism, Education, and Historic Preservation. More than one million women have found purpose and passion in DAR membership.

During the terms of Allene Wilson Grove, President General, and Ruth McBride Powers, State Regent, the Mount St. Helens Chapter was organized with seventeen members on the 16th of April, 1955 and named for the beautiful Mount St. Helens viewed across the Columbia River from the city of St. Helens, Oregon. Alice Victoria Trow Wood was elected the first Regent with Pearly Ross Becker as Vice Regent, Ethel Nelson Robbins as Chaplain, Dorothy Judd Jewell as Recording Secretary, Mary Mobley Jacobs as Treasurer, Livona Bernice Brownlow as Registrar, Helen Frances Miller Vaughn as Historian, and Irene Beatrice Lakin Larson as Librarian. The Charter was issued by the National Society on June 19, 1956.

Charter members were: Pearl Ross Becker, Kathleen Berenice Brownlow, Livona Berenice Brownlow, Gladys Smith Carter, Beulah Post Hall, Florence E. Hamilton, Esther Hinshaw, Mary Mobley, Dorothy Judd Jewell, Irene Beatrice Lakin Larson, Mildren Smith Patterson, Florence Conant Paulson, Ethel Nelson Robbins, Elizabeth F. Smith Simeral, Olga Conant Fox Thompson, Helen Frances Miller Vaughn, Alice Victoria Trow Wood, Fairy Fern

Fisher, Leonla Helen Harrison, Mary Ellen White Hobbs, Rea May Johnson Janes, Nora Isabella Maclay Jordan, Helen Geraldine Pease, Hazel Augusta Waite, and Mary Gibson Maclay Whittier.

Once established Mount St. Helens Chapter – the first and only DAR Chapter to be organized in Columbia County, Oregon, 35th in Oregon, and 2012th in the Nation-proceeded, and continues to take an active role in the community.

The Chapter has preserved local history by placing markers at the grave site of Thomas McKay, an Oregon Pioneer in Scappoose, Oregon (1967); the home of Henry M. Knighton, the founder of St. Helens, Oregon (1970); and the John McVey House which served as an early store and U.S. Post Office in Columbia City, Oregon (1980). The Thomas McKay grave site was rededicated September, 1997.

Chapter members sit on the Caples Buildings and Grounds Committee that oversees the maintenance of the Oregon State Society DAR owned and operated museum complex and the Knapp Social Center located in Columbia City, Oregon. The main buildings and lot were a gift from Mount St. Helens Chapter member, Del Caples Houghton (1959).

The Mount St. Helens Chapter members live in Clatskanie, Portland, Rainier, St. Helens, Scappoose, Vernonia and surrounding areas. We participate in community events, support our youth, contribute to and visit Veteran's Hospitals, promote adult literacy and preserve genealogical records. Mount St. Helens Chapter meets the second Saturday of the month from September through May at 12:30 p.m. at various locations. Each meeting includes an opening ritual, business meeting and a program.

Our previous honored Past Chapter Regents are:

1955-56 Alice Wood
1956-58 Pearl Becker
1958-59 Dorothy Jewell
1959-60 Elizabeth Simerall
1960-61 Grace Magruder

THE COLUMBIA COUNTY AMERICA 250 ANTHOLOGY

1961-64 Bernice Brownlow
1964-68 Mary Jacobs
1968-70 Rea Mae Janes
1970-72 F. Fern Fisher
1972-76 Esther Hinshaw
1976-78 F. Fern Fisher
1978-80 Esther Hinshaw
1980-82 Annie Nielsen
1982-86 Eugenia Dooley
1986-88 Mary Evans
1988-92 Elsie Sorem
1992-94 Eugenia Dooley
1994-96 Virginia Burgh
1996-97 Elsie Sorem
1997-00 Lynnette Nunn
2000-04 Patricia Wheeler
2004-08 Rea Mae Janes
2008-10 Robin Fouche
2010-14 Teresa Maloney
2014-18 Colleen Menze
2018-22 Margaret Schaller
2022-26 Colleen Menze
2026-28 Teresa Maloney

Any woman is eligible for membership who is no less than eighteen years of age and who can prove lineal, blood line, and descent from an ancestor who aided in achieving American independence. She must provide documentation for each statement of birth, marriage, divorce and death.

Admission of membership in the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution provides a unique opportunity to establish a family's heritage and service to the Nation.

Fireworks and More

By Merle Pence

Fireworks

Shards of color pierce the sky as gasps reach up, caressing while they fall.

United

E Pluribus Unum; out of many; one; We are the USA.

Our Flag

Three colors bright (Red, White and Blue), Snapping, Proclaiming; We will survive.

The Long Night

By Jason D. Riley

In the cold of night on a blood-soaked hill, two trees sat watch, one an apple and the other a birch. Around them lay the bodies of men, both dying and dead. Their moans fill the air as their life fades into blackness. A large battle was fought here this day. Why? No one knows. But as the night approached, a single soldier battered and bleeding slowly inched his way up towards the noble sentinels that watched it all unfold. When he reached the trees, he slowly fell upon them, closing his eyes.

“What a day, my friend, what a terrible day,” replied the birch.

“Yes, it was quite a terrible day. I do not understand these men. Why must they fight over little things? Why can’t they just take root?” Answered the apple.

The birch drank deeply from the earth, “My friend, I do not understand men either. Yuck, I hate the taste of this metallic salt that fouls the water.”

“Nor do... Oh, my lovely leaves will brown because of this.” Apple moaned, noticing the soldier curling up around its roots, “Look here, my friend, I have a visitor.” The tree spoke cheerfully.

“Yes, you do, how wonderful,” Replied the birch happily, until it saw the poor soldier shaking in the cold. “Aw, that poor soul, its bark is not thick enough, it’s shaking in the wind. Come, we must help it.”

“I agree, we must help it. It is our duty to help those lesser creatures,” the apple noted, throwing down a large pile of leaves upon the soldier.

Offering it his own leaves, the birch tossed another pile of leaves upon the soldier. Watching the soldier's body calm underneath the pile, the trees smiled at each other.

“Do you think it might be hungry? I only ask because I do have a few apples left,” asked the apple as it looked down upon the soldier sleeping so contentedly upon his bed.

“It could not hurt; if it does not, then another animal will take and spread your seeds. And if it is, it will eat it and still spread your seeds,” answered the birch, playing with a few squirrels that were running through its branches.

With a nod, the apple tossed down two of its ripest apples. Landing next to the soldier, he slowly took a bite. The day had been long, and his stomach was empty. Yet, as he took a bite, tasting the sweetness offered to him, the weight of the world eased a bit; he smiled and looked up at the tree, “Thank you, my woodland friend.”

The apple just happily swayed back and forth, content with its choices.

Up in the heavens, large dark clouds blanketed the sky. Then with a mighty boom, the world exploded with a flash of light, followed by a wall of water that fell to the ground.

“Well, this should help wash away that nasty salt. Oh, I can’t wait to drink the clean water,” replied the birch, fanning out its leaves to catch the water.

As for the apple, it just looked down upon the soldier huddling within its roots, “If its bark could not protect it from the wind, it surely can’t from the rain.” Not knowing what else to do, the apple brought its branches together, leaning out over the soldier sleeping at its feet.

As it moved, it groaned and creaked loudly, causing the soldier to panic and limp away.

“Do not fear, I will not fall. I’ve survived far greater storms than this. Now lie under my canopy and stay dry,” the apple spoke so softly, like a gentle breeze through her leaves, enticing the soldier to return to its roots.

The birch looked over and smiled, throwing leaves upon its friend’s branches, enclosing the soldier in a woodland cave. Within the cave, the soldier rests comfortably and

dry on his bed of leaves and grass. "My thanks to you again." The soldier said as he moved some leaves to make a pillow for his head.

"Oh, this is going to hurt come morning," the apple jested.

"Yes, but what is one more pain weighed against such acts of kindness?"

"Shh, it's asleep now."

The birch looked out over the dismal battlefield, now silent and still, "We shall keep watch now."

As the storm raged above, the two sentinels watched over the sleeping soldier. Keeping him safe from the cold and the wet, protecting him from the violent wind that rushed past, screaming and moaning, and hiding him from the predators that cleared the field.

With the storm passing, the sun lifted itself over the horizon. Poking his head out from underneath his enclosure, the soldier looked out at the new world before him. "I thank you, my friends, for this night." The soldier said as he crawled out upon the muddy grass.

"It looks like a beautiful day, my friend," the apple replied as it straightened itself.

"Why yes, a beautiful day."

As the soldier walked away, the two trees waved their goodbyes.

"It was a good thing what we did," said the apple, watching the soldier returning to its world.

Open Road

By Sarah Rychart

“I think we should go on a trip.”

Lucy Phillips choked on her sip of coffee. She set the cup down on the coffee table and stared in bewilderment at her mother. “What did you say?”

Margaret Phillips didn’t seem bothered by her daughter’s stare of confusion. “A trip. You and I should go on a trip. I can’t remember the last time we went on one together.”

Lucy stared off into space as she considered her mother’s statement. “It’s been years. At the very least not since Dad passed away. I remember when I was twelve we went to Disneyland but I can’t remember anything after that.”

“If it’s actually been that long, all the more reason for us to take one.” Margaret tucked a lock of silver hair behind her ear. “I’m not getting any younger as you know.”

“And I am?” Lucy rolled her eyes. “If we are to go on a trip together--and I’m saying if--where do you intend for us to go? A cruise maybe?”

Margaret shuddered. “Absolutely not! You know I have a fear of open waters. A cruise ship is the last place you’d find me. Those things seem so unsafe. And I’m not too fond of airplanes either, if I’m being perfectly honest.”

“So you’re thinking more of a road trip,” Lucy mused. “Unless you’d rather go by bus or train.”

“I’m not opposed to the idea of going on a train though it might be more expensive than I was thinking of. A hard pass on busses though. Not enough personal space for my liking.”

Lucy leveled her mother with a direct look. “It seems like you might have something in mind. Why don’t you tell me what it is.”

Margaret sighed and set her own cup down on the coffee table. “I have been thinking a lot about this so hear me out. With it being the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of this country this summer, it would be the perfect opportunity to go on a road trip.”

“So you’re not thinking of going abroad but traveling here in the good old U.S. of A?”

“Of course. Why not?”

It was Lucy’s turn to sigh. “Mom, have you given much thought to how high gas prices might be this summer? That’s an important thing to take into consideration when it comes to travel. Were you thinking about getting a rental car or using your own vehicle?”

Margaret wouldn’t meet her daughter’s gaze. “Actually, I was thinking we could take your vehicle. If we did, we wouldn’t have to worry about the price of gas per gallon since your car is electric.”

Lucy resisted the urge to sigh. She should have seen this coming. When she’d bought her car a few months prior, her mother had a lot of questions about how it would run versus how a gas powered car operated. In spite of herself, Lucy found she was warming to the idea of a road trip in her new car.

“We’d need to make sure there were charging stations along our route,” Lucy mused. “Where do you think we should go?”

Margaret leaned forward, her eyes taking on a fervent glow. “I think we should visit one of the national parks. I’ve never been to one and I’ve always wanted to see at least one before I die.”

Lucy snorted. “Mom, you’re in no more danger of dying than I am. I like the idea of visiting a national park during the summer though. The question is where should we go? There are so many to choose from. How should we narrow it down?”

“Well, I’ve been considering that. I think there are more than enough options in our neck of the woods, so to speak, that we don’t have to travel across the country to go to one.”

“So we should stick with the western part of the U.S. then? That doesn’t narrow the list down by that much since most of the national parks are in our part of the country anyway.”

“Let’s go through our options.” Margaret opened up a large atlas and started going through various maps. “There’s Yellowstone of course.”

“I’d love to see it someday but I think it’s the sort of thing you’d need to plan much farther in advance than the amount of time that we have available.” Lucy scrolled through a website she looked up on Yellowstone National Park. “If we were planning this out for six months or more in advance, we could probably make it work but with it being April, we would have needed to start planning it weeks ago. Lodgings and park campgrounds get booked up early so we’d be out of luck this summer. We could always schedule it for next summer if you’d like.”

Margaret shook her head. “I want to plan something for this summer, not next summer. Who knows if I’ll be around by then.”

Lucy suppressed a sigh. “So it sounds like Yellowstone is out. For this year at least.” She looked at her mother expectantly. “Any more ideas?”

Margaret glanced through the atlas again. “I see there are a couple of national parks in Utah. Zion and Arches. Maybe we could hit two national parks if they’re in the same area instead of just one.”

“Utah is a pretty big state and I don’t think those parks are that close to each other.” Lucy felt a twinge of guilt at the crestfallen expression on her mother’s face. “Zion is in southwestern Utah and Arches is in the eastern part of the state. Remember, we’re planning to go in the summer so it’s going to be the hottest time of the year that we’d be traveling there.

Being from western Oregon, it might take some time to get used to the heat, especially if we're spending most of our time there outdoors."

"But there must be some place we could go." Margaret refused to be deterred and give up. "Some place we don't have to book that far out and we won't melt into puddles in the process."

"I have some ideas," Lucy said cautiously. She didn't want to get her mother's hopes up too much but the note of despair creeping into Margaret's voice was more worrying. "What about Crater Lake? It's in southern Oregon and not too far from the Oregon-California border. It would be about six hours of driving and I would need to get a couple of charges in on the way. The charges would take a little longer than filling up a tank of gas or two but the trip is very doable for us. What do you think?"

Margaret's brow creased as she pondered over Lucy's plan. "I suppose that could work but I really had my heart set on visiting a national park outside of Oregon."

"We could visit the Redwoods in California as well," Lucy mused. "It's only another six hours give or take from Crater Lake. We could find some lodgings nearby, visit Crater Lake then drive down to the Redwoods the next day."

Margaret looked over the map of California for several minutes before venturing, "What about Yosemite National Park? That's in California you know and could be a great place to visit too."

"It could be," Lucy said hesitantly. "Are you thinking we would see all three locations? Yosemite is quite a distance from the Redwoods. Well over ten hours. This wouldn't be a weekend trip. It would be a multi day trip if we wanted to see everything that we could at all three parks."

"I'm sure about this." Margaret nodded her head in finality. "I want this to be a road trip to remember. As long as you're able to take the time off work?"

“That’s the good thing about working in a school. I have most of the summer off. Let’s plan it for July so I will be back in plenty of time before the start of the new school year.”

Lucy and Margaret spent the next hour and a half planning their route from start to finish. On the first day they would drive to Klamath Falls and book a hotel for the night before heading to Crater Lake the next morning. They would spend the day at Crater Lake before heading back to the same hotel that night. The third day they would drive to Arcata and once again find a place to stay for the night. The following day they would explore the Redwoods before returning to their hotel for the night and getting up early the next day to drive eleven hours to Copperopolis, California, making a few stops along the way to charge. The sixth day they would visit Yosemite.

The seventh day would be mostly spent driving and charging along the way before stopping in Eureka. The eighth day would be a lot like the previous day, only with the end goal of sleeping in their own beds that night.

Lucy left her mother’s house that evening, promising to come over the following Sunday again so they could hammer out more details about the trip. The following week passed in a flurry of activity for Lucy as she graded homework assignments and math tests, met with her fellow teachers about curriculum all the while coming up with lesson plans for the remainder of the school year. In spite of herself, Lucy found she was getting excited about the upcoming trip with her mother and it felt like a lifeline in the storm of details and projects that needed to be completed by the last day of school.

On Thursday during her lunch break in the staff lounge, Lucy shared her plans with her colleague, Sonya from across the hall. Sonya had asked Lucy if she’d made any plans yet for the summer and Lucy had told her all about how her mother had gotten Lucy to agree to go on a trip to a few national parks.

“That’s so cool!” Sonya exclaimed. “I wish I could do something like that. You need to tell me all about it after you go so I can plan to do something similar. Maybe it will inspire me to actually put something on the calendar.”

Before Lucy could respond, one of the secretaries stuck her head in the doorway to say, “There you are, Lucy. I’ve been trying to reach you. There’s a phone call for you from an older woman. I don’t believe it’s your mother. It doesn’t sound like her voice but I could be wrong about that.”

“Thank you, Janet.” Lucy’s brow furrowed. “I can’t imagine who would be calling me here at this time of day. Not even my mother would do that unless there was something wrong.” She looked down at her silent cell phone. “I’ve missed a couple of calls from the same number. Definitely not Mom. I’ll take the call in here.”

Lucy had scarcely put the receiver to her ear and said “hello” when a trembling older woman’s voice came across the line.

“I’m so sorry to have to call you dear but it’s about your mother. I’m afraid she’s gone.”

“Gone?” Lucy’s voice was thick. “What do you mean? Where did she go?”

“I’m not explaining myself very well. My name is Betsy and I live next door to your mother. We check in on each other regularly in case anything was to happen to either of us. Margaret has my spare key and I have hers. When I went out to get my newspaper this morning, I saw that there were two newspapers on her walkway. That never happens. She always picks it up first thing in the morning. Then I remembered I hadn’t seen her since Tuesday evening when she was outside watering her plants. I couldn’t recall seeing her at all yesterday so I went over to check on her.” Betsy’s voice broke. “She must have passed away in her sleep.”

A dull roaring filled Lucy's ears. It couldn't be true. Her mother couldn't be dead. They had just made plans for this summer. Lucy was supposed to see her mother on Sunday, only a few days away. There had to be some mistake.

"Are you certain?" She choked out the words. "Are you sure that she's-" She couldn't bring herself to even speak the word aloud.

"Well, they just took her away after she'd been pronounced dead so I can't be any more certain than that. I know it's a great shock because it was unexpected. It was to me too. Once I got my wits about me, I went looking for Margaret's address book and found all the numbers she had for you. I knew I needed to call you right away even if you were at work. I hope I did the right thing."

After assuring Betsy she'd done nothing wrong and that Lucy appreciated Betsy for letting her know what had happened, Lucy hung up the receiver and dissolved into heaving sobs.

Sonya wrapped Lucy into a hug, patting her back as Lucy's crying subsided. "We'll find someone to cover the last part of the day for you," she promised. "I'll tell the office you're heading home. Text me when you get there so I know you made it home safely."

Lucy promised she would and headed home, stopping a few times on the way when the tears started up again. When she got to her place, she found a message from her boss informing her that they'd given her the next week off from work and to let them know if she needed more time than that. Lucy felt relieved that she didn't have to face anyone else while the grief was so fresh and raw.

After a fitful night of sleep, Lucy headed over to her mother's house to begin the laborious task of going through her things. She had scarcely gotten out of the car when a gray-haired woman about her mother's age came out of the house next door and introduced herself as Betsy.

“If you need anything at all, don’t even hesitate to let me know. I’ll help you any way I can. It’s the very least I can do.”

Lucy thanked her before pulling out the key her mother had given her years ago, “in case she might need it someday.” She’d never had a reason to put it to use until now. She unlocked the front door and stood in the doorway, breathing in the scent that always reminded her of her mother. Lucy could almost believe that at any moment her mother would come around the corner and say “there you are!”

Lucy slammed the door behind her with finality and moved into the house. No chance of that happening. Her mother was never coming back and she hadn’t even got to tell her goodbye.

Lucy looked about her- at her mother’s dining room table, the armchairs where she and her mother had sat together not even a week ago, the scarred coffee table, television set featured prominently in the room, the china hutch that housed all of Margaret’s china and glass valuables. What was she going to do with all of it? There was no way she could keep it all. There was also no way she could part with any of it.

She shook her head. Most of the furniture would have to go. The appliances too. It would be painful to see her mother’s possessions haggled over at a garage sale. Maybe she could donate some to a thrift store or a women’s shelter. She would need to get some boxes to pack up the smaller items until she decided what to do with them.

Over the next week, Lucy methodically went through the house cataloging things to keep for now and things that she needed to part with. She stubbornly avoided her mother’s bedroom, unable to bring herself to enter the room where Margaret spent the last hours of her life. By the following Thursday evening, she’d boxed up everything in the living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and the spare bedroom. She’d given Betsy and a few of Margaret’s neighbors and friends some of Margaret’s furniture, lamps, vases, glassware and

knickknacks that they'd expressed interest in. Lucy had hired a couple of movers to haul away the larger furniture such as the sofa, dresser, china hutch and beds. They were set to come the following day but first she would have to tackle her mother's bedroom.

Resolutely, Lucy marched into the room and stripped all the linens off the bed, bunching everything into a ball on the floor. She took all the clothes out of the closet and laid them on the stripped bed. There were a few boxes in the closet with photo albums and Lucy's school pictures, report cards and school assignments. She resolved to go through that later. She pushed the boxes over to the bed and her eyes fell on a journal stacked on her mother's nightstand. Without considering what she was doing, she leafed through the pages until she came to the last page of writing. The page was dated last Tuesday.

Lucy sat down heavily on the bed and began to read.

Tuesday April 21st

I'm really looking forward to the road trip Lucy and I have planned for July. I felt guilty about bringing my idea about the National Park road trip up to her at first but I felt strongly it was something that we both needed. Especially Lucy. I worry about Lucy. She works long hours and never gets out and does anything fun like most people her age. She never thinks about herself but she's always worrying about everyone else- her students, her colleagues, her neighbors and most of all her meddling mother. I worry about what Lucy will do when I'm gone one day. I need to hang on long enough for Lucy and I to go on this trip because I know if I wasn't able to go, Lucy wouldn't go either. I wish Lucy had more friends and a better support network. I wouldn't worry so much about her if she did. Lucy's world, outside of me, is so small. I wish I

could help her see that she is the only one who is holding herself back. She has so much to offer others, if she would just put herself out there and take a chance once in a while. Maybe that's a lot to ask for from Lucy but I hope she'll be able to do so one day. A mother can always hope.

Tears blurred Lucy's vision. Her mother knew her so well and that knowledge hurt like a kick to the gut. She had given up on the road trip like her mother had predicted but how could she be expected to go on it without the woman who had come up with it in the first place?

In a flash an idea sent her brain into overdrive. She didn't have to go alone. There was someone else she could ask.

Before she could think better of it, Lucy hit the phone icon and listened to the ringing before it was picked up.

"Sonya, how would you feel about going on a road trip with me?"

Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness

By Steve Toschi

The “inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are relatively new concepts for humans on earth – just 250 years old. The men who drafted the Constitution were inspired by a group of philosophers. The Declaration of Independence announced the departure of the colonists to the rule of a King or Queen. These men (doubtless supported by the women of the times) created a document that transcended human existence to its current imperfect state. Our freedom is unique in the world. We are bound by a document, a piece of paper, and the words upon it. That document has gone on to shape the world. We celebrate 250 years of something that never should be taken for granted.

About the Columbia County Authors Alliance

The mission of the Columbia County Authors Alliance (CCAA) is to support Columbia County, Oregon writers through educational and networking opportunities, local author events, anthologies, regular creative gatherings, and building connections with readers. The real goal: building connections between writers—because when writers support each other, everyone's work gets stronger. And when the writing community thrives, readers are drawn to the magic, too.

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