

### What "Freedom" Means To Me

In grade school, in textbooks and through my parents, I learned about freedom. The American Civil War, Slavery, and other historical disputes all revolved around the issue of certain "freedoms" such as freedom of religion, speech or the pursuit of happiness. While I understand each of these ideals, it was not until I enlisted in the Air Force that freedom took on a real and true meaning for me.

Freedom is not something I can see, touch or smell but a feeling, an emotion, which comes deep from within my inner core. It continually evolves into deeper meaning with the ever-changing world events and as I begin my own family.

Freedom to me is symbolic; America is a symbol of hope and fairness. People come here from other countries to have the opportunity at better lives. In addition, the flag, any service member in uniform, the Constitution, the Pledge of Allegiance, the date of July 4<sup>th</sup>, hearing the Star Spangled Banner, and our older veterans are all symbols of pride and reflection. At times these are overwhelming sights, giving me goose bumps all over my body, bringing tears to my eyes.

Freedom is my right to vote, to buy alcohol, to join the military, to worship as I wish. Freedom is my guarantee of free will and making choices for myself and all Americans despite gender, race, or creed.

Freedom is sacrifice; it means millions of servicemen and women will miss another anniversary, birthday or birth of their newborn child. I missed 6 months of my own daughter's life. Freedom is the sacrifice we give of ourselves (and our families) for the well-being and better good of the nation and world. Ultimately, the price of freedom is painfully bitter to us all...death. It pains me to read the daily newspapers as yet another American has died for protecting our freedoms and enforcing the freedoms of the Iraqi people.

Freedom is the opportunity to create your own destiny. I honestly believe that if you put your mind to something you can attain it if you have the desire and will. Opportunity is not discriminatory. Ultimately, it means I can provide better opportunities for my family.

Freedom is the need to protect my family, friends and relatives. It is the protection and freedom of my fellow Americans on our own soil against terrorism. It is for the good and well being of this country. Further, freedom is the protection of the strides this country and my forefathers have made in years past. To reflect on where our country started, how it has evolved and what it has become. I will uphold all sacrifices this country has endured to ensure future generations are afforded the same rights.

In conclusion, for me Freedom is history, Freedom is feelings, Freedom is symbols, Freedom is rights and privileges, Freedom is sacrifice, Freedom is the opportunity provided to all and Freedom is protection. All these connotations are what one intense word means to me.