

## WHAT FREEDOM MEANS TO ME

It's a precious gift one generation bestows upon the next.  
It's what a country gives to its people and what its people give in return.  
It's what our forefathers envisioned as they drafted the Declaration of Independence declaring  
"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...."  
It's the crack in the Liberty Bell symbolizing its fragile nature  
and our responsibility to preserve those same ideals.  
It's the Stars & Stripes waving gracefully over 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.  
It's 268 words eloquently spoken at Gettysburg declaring, "Governments of the people,  
by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."  
It's the soldier at the Tomb of the Unknowns pacing solemnly in silent reverence  
to those who fell in defense of her name.  
It's the Battle of Midway and the insurmountable courage displayed against overwhelming odds.  
It's the landing of 100,000 men on the beaches of Normandy to defend the belief.  
It's Lady Liberty's torch illuminating the path for all to see.  
It's Nathan Hale's final words  
"I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country."  
It's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his immortal words "I have a dream."  
It's Apollo 11 landing on the moon, echoed by the words  
"One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."  
It's ceremony and celebration,  
It's the render of a salute as the flag is lowered for Retreat  
and the rejoicing of a child at the sight of a fireworks finale.  
It's the Veteran at the Vietnam Memorial shedding a tear for friends lost many years ago.  
It's firefighters valiantly searching through the rubble of the World Trade Center for survivors  
and displaying our colors for the world to see.  
It's our nation's symbol soaring high over the backdrop of majestic mountain peaks.  
It's cemeteries in far-off lands commemorated to fallen comrades.  
It's Challenger & Columbia meeting their untimely demise.  
It's a nation in mourning as one of its greatest leaders passes on.  
It's a 21-gun salute as the final honor for a life given in defense of all she stands for.  
It's my grandfather serving in the Pacific during World War II  
and my father devoting a career to the same.

For everything that freedom is, there is one thing it is not...free. Freedom comes at price and is not without consequences. It requires vigilance and sacrifice, effort and determination, strength and compassion. It's the foundation upon which America was built and the legacy we continue to protect.