

# 5 - What Each of Us Can Do

We, as a nation, face a dilemma. On one hand, we have serious issues facing us which can only be dealt with effectively by an involved citizenry. On the other hand, achieving the level of citizenship we need is going to require a different mindset, will probably take a generation to achieve – and only then with great leadership. One wonders how many generations we have left!

## "A Journey of 1000 Miles ....."

However, it can be done. As Je Li, the Chinese philosopher said, "A journey of 1000 miles must begin with a single step." In the case of an entire nation, it must start with

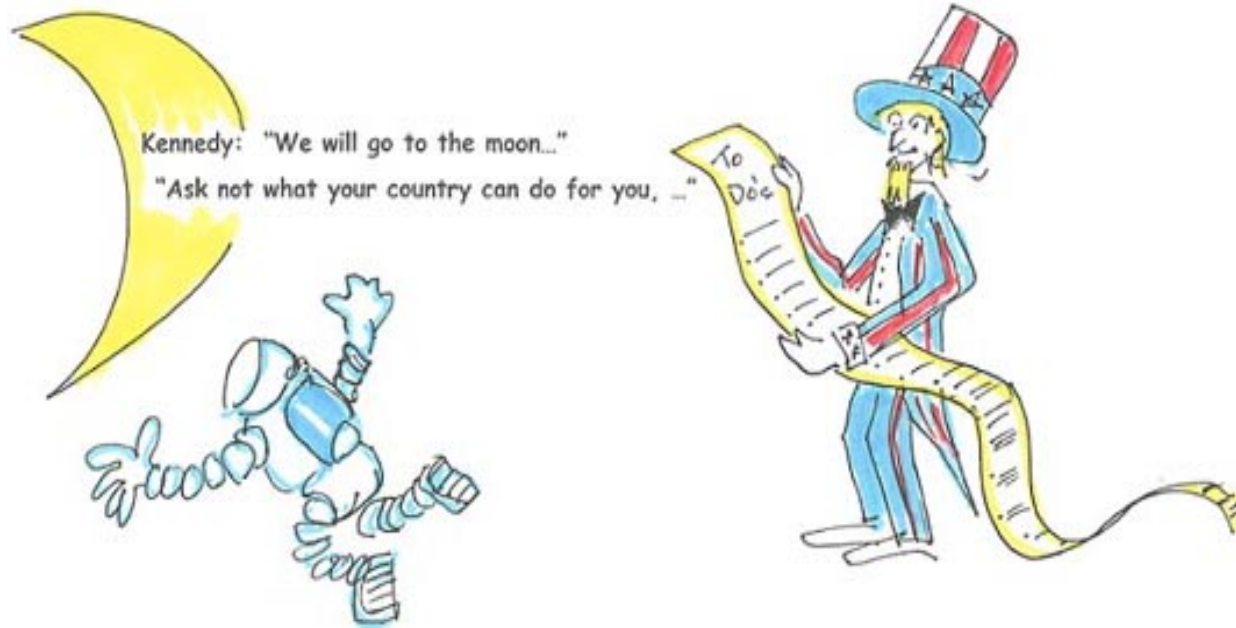


millions of first steps. Our first step is to create an awareness and recognition that a lack of involved citizenry is the problem of our time, and that it is worthy of our best resources and efforts. This awareness will occur when individuals in visible positions embrace this notion and publicize it.

Former President George W. Bush brought some attention to the matter and was right on track when, in one of his State of the Union speeches, he stated that every American child should have a solid understanding of the basic documents of the United States before they leave high school. While this would be a useful step, what is needed to repair our nation goes far beyond that.

## "Ask Not What Your Country ....."

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy threw out two great challenges. One was to send "an American safely to the moon before the end of the decade". We met that challenge with a few months to spare! Kennedy's other and more profound challenge sums up this book's



message best: "And so my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you - Ask what you can do for your country.." And yet some forty four years later, there has not been a concerted effort by us, as citizens, to accomplish this challenge.

### Small Steps of Citizenship

Being a good citizen doesn't require that we run for public office or found an organization like the Make-A Wish foundation. I believe there is only way to accomplish Kennedy's admonition is for each of us to do the simple things that, when done by each of us as the opportunities arise and over a lifetime, keep the country strong and thus free. These simple things are the actions each of us must take even if they take away from our "pursuit of happiness". Those million first steps need to be followed by millions of small steps - or small sacrifices. As General Colin Powell said in this speech at the 2000 Republican national convention, "we must do what is good for America", not just what is good for ourselves.

Our choices are clear.

- First, we need to decide individually if this is a worthy cause. If you need reminding of what happens when we aren't vigilant, click on this spectacular pictorial [TRIBUTE TO THE HEROES OF 911](#) with Enya's "Only Time" music - it may take a few minutes to download but it's an wonderful piece of work and will move you.
- Second, we need to become aware of specific actions each of us needs to take. That's the purpose of this book.
- Third, we need to understand how taking these actions will make a difference and lead to a stronger democracy. To paraphrase Edward Everett Hale, "It's true I am only one, but I am one. And the fact that I cannot do everything should not prevent me from doing what I can do."
- And fourth, we must make "the doing" of these simple actions a part of our daily life. As the adage goes, "If not you, then who? If not now, then when?"

Adlai E. Stevenson, Jr. said it well. "...; a patriotism which is not a short and frenzied

outburst of emotion but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime."

