

WHO
WILL



AMERICA?
What One Person Can Do

Edwin Nicolaides Homer



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i - Dedication

Emily and Rachel Homer

You've given me great encouragement at times I really needed it and made important contributions in your own ways. I love you both dearly!

David Viscott

Thanks for calling me back in 1987. Thanks for always being there for me, for giving me everything you could and for being yourself. There will never be another like you. Your life's work will continue to gain the recognition it deserves. I am sorry you weren't able to come to that Friday meeting. I miss your voice on the radio, the phone calls, and your cutting to the heart of the callers' personal struggles. The world misses you.

[Click here](#) to listen to a couple of actual calls with listeners on his KABC talk show and to get a sense of David's style and insightfulness.

Johnny Corr

A high school athletic friend who gave his life for us. He was killed in Vietnam on December 28th, 1967 - he was 23 years old. His name is on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Panel 32E, Line 85. He was survived by his parents, two brothers and one sister.

Public officials and individuals who have resisted intimidation

Thank you - we are a better place because of those acts of courage. The Giraffe Project is a great organization that recognizes individuals who "stick their neck out".



And to [those](#) who encouraged and provided assistance to me during the gestation of this

effort.



Dr. David Viscott

Some Snippets of Who He Was

- An [email](#) from someone who also misses David.
- Click PLAY to listen to David's Christmas eve call about what to tell kids about Santa Claus - (3 minutes & 30 seconds).

- Click PLAY to listen to a call from his "David Viscott, M.D. Talks to KIDS" series.

ii - Preface

Long Distance High

Sports have been an important factor in developing the foundation of this book. In the mid '80s when I turned my attention from tennis to triathlons, I spent more time training, and most of it was spent alone. I found that I never have more clarity than when I am taking a long run, swimming or biking, when I experience what is called the *long-distance high*. That is when I "write" my best letters, do my best "arguing", and do my clearest thinking.

It was during these training sessions that my perspective began to take shape, and I began to believe that the single most important issue in this country is not any of the problems we hear about on the news every day, but rather that each of us, as citizens, is not living life for the greater good of all. We are not doing the small things that, when done on a day-to-day basis as the opportunities arise, keep issues (i.e. the cracks) from becoming so large, and thus ensure that the country will continue to be strong and free.

Formative Life Circumstances

My point of view had been shaped by a lifetime of instances - events that fashioned my perceptions of the world. As this book began to come together, I was struck by how these incidents had shaped my way of looking at what is required of us as fellow human beings to make daily life better for ourselves and others. These experiences taught me how life ought *not* to be, but it was years before my beliefs took shape and formed this book.

- **The Turtle**

It may have all started with my earliest, and perhaps most distressful, recollection. At the age of 4 or 5, I was playing with an older boy who lived at the end of my street. We were in the woods behind his house when we came across a large turtle. To my horror and sadness, he took a hatchet and proceeded to chop through its shell until it died. It was the first time I asked the question: *Why would someone do that?* — partner to the question *Does anybody care?*

- **The Pig**

The next life-shaping incident happened during spring festival while I was an undergraduate at Duke University. In addition to activities like chariot races and tugs of war, there was a contest in which members of each fraternity (intoxicated members is more accurate) tried to catch a greased pig.

During the contest, a few guys finally stopped the pig and then others piled on. When they got off, the pig couldn't walk — one of its legs had been broken. Amazingly many

thought it was funny! Finally someone got a pistol and shot the animal to put it out of its misery. Why would anybody do that? Does anybody *care*? Whenever I think of this incident, I try to remember if and when I spoke up. I may have, but I'm not sure and that bothers me.

- **Acid In Her Face**

In my late twenties, I moved to California. I watched with horror one particular newscast – the lead story was that of a 13 year girl who had acid thrown in her face when she opened the front door to her own home. That incident first triggered my thinking that we don't do enough, that we don't get involved, that we watch or hear about these types of incidents and say "Oh what a shame" but then we "turn the channel", at least figuratively.

- **Lizzie**

My grandmother, Lizzie, had always been special to me. As a youngster, my Dad and I would drive her from Pelham, New York, to her summer cottage in rustic Lyme, New Hampshire. As she grew older, she wasn't able to function well alone and it was decided to put her in a nursing home, the equivalent of taking her real life away.

While I occasionally saw her at the nursing home, she had never met my two daughters, Emily and Rachel. I wanted the girls to know Lizzie and vice versa. Many times I thought about taking them to see her, but never did. In late 1981, Lizzie died and I had failed to fulfill that dream, to allow my daughters to know their great grandmother. In her memory, I wrote a good-bye poem. Part of the poem summed up my feelings and the point of this.

"...My one regret is that Emily and Rachel you did not meet,
To bring them to you, that was my feat...."

The lesson, *seize the moment* to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves or in 1990's talk, "*Just Do It*" really took hold of me then.

- **Ruffian and Foolish Pleasure**

In 1975, there were two great thoroughbred racehorses in the U.S. – *Ruffian* and *Foolish Pleasure*. *Ruffian*, a filly, had won the American Filly Triple Crown. *Foolish Pleasure*, a mare, had won the Kentucky Derby. On July 6th, there was a match race at Belmont, NY, between the two of them, to see who would be horse of the year.

At about the mile mark, *Ruffian* broke her ankle. She and her rider crumpled to the ground. I watched in disbelief as the other horse and its jockey continued without stopping to comfort *Ruffian* or her jockey. *What kind of society are we where winning and finishing are more important than comforting someone or an animal in pain?* *Ruffian* was later "put down" - a euphemism for an animal being killed humanely after an unsuccessful attempt at surgery.

For more information on Ruffian and Foolish Pleasure, check out www.thoroughbredchampions.com/gallery/ruffian1.htm which describes this match race and the attempt to save Ruffian's life.

Author's Note: After reading the above story, a reader sent me a note about the 100 yard dash at the [Special Olympics](#) in Seattle a few years back. The story was verified with Special Olympics Washington. [Enjoy it!](#)

- **Empty Ashtrays and Fast Food Trash**

An act that has always amazed and angered me is to see someone empty their ashtray in a parking lot. Seeing someone throw the remains of their fast food lunch out the window or seeing one of the millions of individuals who hold a smoked cigarette outside their window and just let it go invoke a similar reaction. The importance of responsibility in a society was developing in me, as was a deep frustration that no one ever says anything about it.

- **Triathlon Training and Trash**

In the summer of 1987, my family was on vacation on the coast of South Carolina. I was training to compete in a major triathlon and took long runs each day along what I had always remembered, as a child, to be beautiful pristine beaches. Rather than enjoy the warmth of the day or the sounds of the ocean, my thoughts were focused on the incredible variety of garbage that had been exposed as the tide receded. There was food and food wrappers, spent fireworks, diapers, toys, and other things I won't mention. *Who did people think would clean this up? Didn't they care about the appearance of the beach for others?*

From Speech to 'Unfinished' Web Book

Toastmasters Speech

Those perceptions began to crystallize when, in early 1987, I joined [Toastmasters](#), an organization that helps individuals develop speaking skills. The Toastmasters manual contains topics for ten brief speeches. As I began to work on speech number three, entitled "Something Emotional," I began to formulate my thoughts. Over and over the same words came to me, "Who will take care of this country? Where is the special interest group for America? Does anybody care? Who will love America?". This speech was so successful that I was asked to give it to other Toastmasters clubs as well as to a number of service organizations.

I always ended the speech quoting the now-famous section of the President Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address - "And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." I spoke of the Chinese proverb that says a journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step. I told the story of Candy Lightner who founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving ([MADD](#)) after her daughter was killed by a car driven by a drunken cannery worker. Yet the audience reaction was weak, as if they were thinking, *That's interesting, but what can I do?* I began thinking about simple actions that, when done by

each of us on a daily basis over a lifetime, would keep our democracy strong. By early 1988, I had developed a one page list of 35 actions called What One Person Can Do that I handed out after the speech.

First the Title

I also had begun thinking of how to expose this message to more people. I laid out a rough business plan for a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting citizenship. While I considered names like Americans For America and On Behalf of America, I kept hearing the echo of "Who Will Love America?" which was to ultimately become this book's title. For a variety of reasons, the name of the non-profit became Good Citizen.

Then the Logo

Early on, I wrote the words "Who Will Love America?" with a heart replacing the word Love. But it never was just any heart - it was the country's heart. And that is where the idea came from to put a caricature of the flag inside the heart. And for me, it was always a broken heart not a whole one.



It was a flag-heart that had cracks in it and where the stars were falling out of it and turning to tears. It was at that point I realized the Cracked Flag-Heart logo would replace the word "Love" in the title.

Patriotism vs. Citizenship

I have had some concerns that the "Love America" part of the title would construe a patriotic message rather than the intended message about what each of us, as one person, can do; and what is necessary to keep a democracy strong and thus a country free. The book is not about, flag waving or "love it or leave it". Neither are in my nature. The book is about who will care enough about the great things this country has to offer to do what is necessary to sustain them. For me, these reasons include that:

- the country is gorgeous and has incredible natural resources,
- we are a good people helping each other and others around the world in times of need,
- we are diverse which makes life interesting, and
- we are free - doing and becoming what we chose.

The book is about the responsibility part of freedom. The beliefs expressed in this book should not be viewed as conservative or liberal, Democratic or Republican - they are simply *American*. No political statements have been intended.

Then the Content

The book evolved slowly during the 1990s in between some life changes – the co-founding of

The Information Technology Group, a Big 5 alternative management consulting group; the death of my mother; a divorce; and two girls in college. There was also some perfection-driven procrastination and uncertainty over the process of getting this book published.

As I began to think about the actions each of us could do, I realized that many of the actions had common characteristics and thus could be grouped into categories. For example, there are actions that "remind us of our heritage" and those which "keep us involved in the democratic process". I ended up with [six categories](#) of actions.

And Finally a Web Book

In the later 1990s I was struggling with how to finish the book. Do I send book proposals to publishers? Seek out a grant so I could take a year off while finishing the book? Continue to do what I can, when I can? There was no end in sight.

Then in early 1999, it happened suddenly. I just gave in to the message. I finally realized how important the message was to me and that these other issues like money, recognition, how and when to publish simply didn't matter. My small gift to the country would be to publish the book to the web, free of charge, to encourage citizens to take action. There really isn't an end to being a responsible citizen so I've structured the book to let others share their thoughts and stories related to the actions.

This book is about those actions, about what you, *as one person*, can do to help repair the cracks, to live for the greater good of all.



Special Olympics 100 Yard Dash Story

This story says a lot - read on, and enjoy! They call some of these people "retarded"...

A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash.

At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry.

The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed him and said: "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes.

People who were there are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down we all know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course. Pass it on...we all need to change our hearts.

Author's Note: When I called Special Olympics Washington to confirm this story, their initial reaction was "Oh, that happens all the time."

BACK

1 - Overwhelming Issues

Have you ever wondered what the most pressing problems facing our country are? There are lots of choices, aren't there? While the issues change from year-to-year and decade-to-decade, and while each of us would probably come up with a different list and ranking, I believe many of us would agree that the United States faces some huge issues as we enter the technology-driven, 21st century. Here is a sampling of some of those issues.

Economic Issues



Education Issues



Environment Issues



Government Issues



Health and Life Issues



Law and Order Issues



National Security Issues



Social Issues



A Nashville FM radio station's dedication to those who lost their lives at Columbine High School summarizes our current state of affairs pretty well. Read [The Paradox](#).

Over the years, I've come to believe that the most significant issue facing the United States is, in fact, none of these and that these issues are only symptoms of a more fundamental problem – one which I believe is the core issue of our time and one which must be addressed for these other more visible problems to be made more manageable or resolved and for the United States to survive as we now know it.





1. What to do about the United States' quarter-trillion dollar trade deficit.

In 1999, the U.S. purchased \$255 billion more goods and services from foreign nations than those nations purchased from the United States . In June 2000, our trading deficit was \$30.6 billion.

In 1998, Congress established the Trade Deficit Review Commission to study the nature, causes and consequences of our trade deficits. While the Commission's November 2000 final report contained two widely differing conclusions (a Republican view and a Democratic view), there was general agreement that a large and growing deficit cannot continue indefinitely without negative consequences.

2. How to ensure that the Social Security and Medi-Care benefit programs remain solvent as the baby boom generation approaches retirement age.

According to the latest report from the Social Security's Board of Trustees:

- by 2015 the amount of money put into the Social Security System from payroll taxes will be less than the monies paid out in benefits, and
- by 2037 the Social Security System will be able to pay less than three quarters of the promised benefits, thus pushing millions of low-income retired Americans into poverty.

The report concludes that unless Social Security is reformed, either payroll tax rates will have to increase by up to fifty percent or the system's already meager promised benefits will have to be cut by almost a third.

3. How to provide affordable, quality health care for all Americans.

While America probably has the best medical care in the world, most its citizens don't have access to it for a variety of reasons.

- Few Americans can afford the costs of medical care and need insurance to help them pay for health care.
- A staggering number of Americans, 41 million, cannot even afford the cost of health care insurance and have no health care insurance and thus their access to medical care is limited to clinics. And eight out of 10 of these are people are employed! - just working for small organizations that can't afford health benefits or self-employed.

- Many Americans are underinsured because of the high cost of health care insurance. Insurance fraud on the part of healthcare providers has contributed to the high costs.
- Many Americans who do have insurance still don't get the care they need because HMO-type insurance organizations place profit over medicine and disallow needed medical procedures and medicines.

4. How to simplify and make more equitable the taxes needed to run state and federal government.

While it is clear that the federal government and state governments need money to operate, it is equally clear that:

- the way they collect that money is too complicated,
- the amount of taxes paid by various individuals and organizations isn't equitable and,
- they don't need as much money as they collect because much of what they spend it on is of questionable value and because their bureaucracies are so inefficient.

In fiscal year 2000, Americans paid over \$2.4 trillion in taxes! This marked the highest peacetime tax burden in history and represented 21% of America's gross domestic product.

It seems ironic that high taxes triggered our breaking away from England to form the United States and yet we pay enormous taxes today that are seemingly accepted by most of us.

Many of us think that the federal and state income tax brackets we are in represents the percentage of taxes we pay but that's not the half of it! A single person living in California who owns a home and makes \$60,000 would pay taxes in the neighbor of 40% or \$24,000 of their income! These taxes would include the following.

Type of Tax (1)	Appr. Amount
U.S. income tax	20% of income
State income tax	9% of income
Property tax	\$3,000/year
Gasoline tax (2)	34%/gallon
Sales tax	7.95% of many purchases
State & federal telephone taxes	% of bill
State & federal gas taxes	1% of bill

1) These don't include estate taxes, or death taxes as they are sometimes called, which seem particularly burdensome in that they tax money that has already been taxed.

2) The California Energy Commission reports that in December 1999 the cost of a \$1.36 gallon of gas in California had the following components: crude oil, 59 cents; refinery margin, 21 cents; dealer margin, 10 cents; and taxes, 46 cents.

3) Here is a list of [other taxes](#) we pay from an email I received.

And to make matters worse, figuring out how much income tax or estate tax one owes is time consuming and expensive. The tax code is convoluted to the point where multiple tax experts come up with different amounts owed for the same individual or corporation.

And taxes just don't collect money, they provide incentives and disincentives for following certain government social policies such as:

- home ownership,
- making contributions,
- not purchasing expensive automobiles,
- discouraging the use of alcohol and tobacco products,
- growing and not growing certain crops and,
- having children and so on and so forth.

In a very real sense, a high tax burden reduces one's freedoms. The freedom to make one's way in this world - the freedom to enjoy the fruits of one's labor.

BACK



A. What to do about a faltering K through 12 public education system.

Educated citizens are the underpinnings of a democracy, yet our public education system struggles.

1. Teachers are underpaid;
2. Class size is too large for learning;
3. The lack of safety at some schools is not conducive to learning;
4. Schools are being asked to compensate for a lack of parenting;
5. There is grade inflation;
6. There are pressures to "socially promote and graduate", rather than hold back students who haven't met the grade-level standards;
7. Teachers' unions balk at the notion of teacher evaluation;
8. The manner of promoting teachers and principals "makes excellence a matter of chance, not design";
9. There is a rarity of great schools for minority and disadvantaged children;
10. The focus of teaching is more and more on passing standardized tests rather than on learning; and
11. With the tenure system, it's almost impossible to remove unfit teachers.

And with all these issues, *"whenever a worthwhile school proposal or legislation initiative is under consideration, those with a vested interest in the educational status quo use political muscle to block reform."* - USA Today

Below is an email sent to me by a 17 year boy describing a community project he had just completed for his Eagle Scout. The 15 spelling and grammar mistakes in this brief note don't speak well for our education system.

"Subject: Rotery Club/ eagle scout prject

Hello, My name is John Doe. I have just done my eagle scout project at a
near by Convalescent home. I redid the bird aviary inside the home. The old
bird aviary was in ruins, the paint was chipping, weeds were growing out of
the rocks, and all but one bird has died. Sense the resents has little to do
during the day watching the birds is something they do to pass the time. But

lately, watching the bird die and the conditions going down in the Aviary has been depressing.

To help I remove the rocks and top level of dirt, sterilized and repainted the walls, laid down fresh grass, put in a bird bath, built bird houses and nesting houses, installed a roof screen to keep out bugs, put in hanging perches and toys, and introduced new birds to the aviary. Now residents of the home crowd around the aviary and watch in amusement all day. Visitors have complemented on the new Aviary constantly and some stop and watch for a while them self's."

BACK

Environment Issues



How to prevent further pollution of, and to clean up, our polluted rivers, lakes, oceans and groundwater.

The Ocean

Worldwide, 14 billion pounds of garbage are dumped into the oceans each year. This outweighs the pounds of fish harvested by 3 to 1. The amount of garbage in our oceans has resulted in a) harvesting being restricted or banned on shell-fishing grounds, b) tons of garbage washing up on beaches, and c) the poisoning of fish and other salt water creatures.

The number of beach closures in the U.S. doubled between 1999 and 2000.

Ninety percent of the nation's pollution-filtering wetlands have been destroyed and 60 percent of the world's coral reefs are threatened by pollution, sedimentation and over-harvesting.

The [Surfrider Foundation](#) is a non-profit organization that works to protect our oceans, waves, and beaches. In their 2002 State of the Beach report, Surfrider indicates that "California beaches were closed or had warnings almost 6,000 times during 2000, nearly twice as many times as in 1999.

Rivers

Aniston, Alabama PCBs Monsanto. healthy fish die in minutes when submerged, chickens they raise had PCBs.

Lakes

Groundwater

Scientists estimate that each year up to seven million Americans become sick from contaminated tap water, which can also be lethal.

MTBE is a chemical used in gasoline. It is deadly in small amounts. MTBE has leaked into our groundwater drinking supplies in many places throughout the U.S. as a result of old gasoline storage tanks. Some communities such as Santa Monica, California have had to shut down their own water supplies and import water via truck because of high levels of MTBE in their ground water!

How to maintain adequate supplies of drinking water.

We are beginning to see shortages of water needed for drinking, for industry and for agriculture. These shortages are being driven by the increase in population and the fact that more and more of our sources of drinking water become polluted and with the natural changes in weather patterns.

Even in the Great Lakes region that contains 90% of the fresh water in the United States, officials and environmentalists are concerned the increasing demand on waters that feed the Great Lakes could result in dangerously low water levels and harm fishing and other animal habitats.

What is a proper balance between growth versus the quality of life and the preservation of other life and our natural resources?

In November 1992, the Union of Concerned Scientists met in Washington DC where 1,600 of the senior scientists, including a majority of the living Nobel Laureates endorsed a statement entitled, "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity." It stated: "A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated."

Here are a few resources dealing with this issue:

The Vermont-based [Sustainability Institute](#) is a think-tank dedicated to sustainable resource use, sustainable economics and sustainable community. They provide information, analysis, and practical demonstrations that can foster transitions to sustainable systems at all levels of society, from local to global.

The [Center for a New American Dream](#) helps Americans change the way they consume to improve quality of life, protect the environment, and promote social justice.

[The Nature Conservancy](#) works with communities, businesses and individual citizens to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

How to reduce noise and light pollution so we can enjoy our natural world

Noise Pollution

"Noise from road traffic, jet planes, jet skis, garbage trucks, construction equipment, manufacturing processes, lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and boom boxes, to name a few, are among the unwanted sounds that are routinely broadcast into the air.

The problem with noise is not only that it is unwanted, but also that it negatively affects human health and well-being. Problems related to noise include hearing loss, stress, high blood pressure, sleep loss, distraction and lost productivity, and a general reduction in the quality of life and opportunities for tranquility."

- from the [Noise Pollution Clearinghouse](#) website

A book, *Noise & Health*, edited by Thomas H. Fay and published by The New York Academy of Medicine (1991) presents a critical and comprehensive review of available world literature on the effects of noise on all of the body's systems. It defines noise and its sources, documents the specific health hazards of noise on the body and indicates needs for further research.

Light Pollution

Light Pollution happens because of poorly designed and improperly aimed light fixtures called luminaries. Luminaries that do not offer adequate shielding usually spill wasted light into the sky and across property lines where it does not benefit anyone. When light spills into the sky, it reflects off of tiny airborne dust and moisture particles and creates what is known as skyglow.

Skyglow not only affects the scientific research of astronomers but It also affects everyone else who simply enjoys a dark night sky abundant with stars. The starry night sky has all but disappeared in many areas and has been effected to varying degrees for nearly 90% of Americans! With dark-adapted eyes, we should be able to see at least 2,600 stars under mildly polluted residential skies on any clear moonless evening. In remote rural areas that have not suffered urban sprawl and over development, it is possible to see four times that many stars on a clear night. Today, in most urban areas, and now in even many suburban and rural areas fewer than 100 stars are visible in the night sky. Most children born today will never know the splendor of a star filled night sky and that alone is tragic.

Light Pollution also robs some of their desire and need for a sound night's sleep when artificial illumination coming from poorly aimed and unshielded light fixtures shines glare into our windows at night. It has become difficult to achieve a dark bedroom at night even with blinds, shades and room darkening drapes.

There is also some research to suggest that too much artificially generated light at night can have very adverse affects on our health by disrupting natural hormone (i.e. melatonin) production that our bodies require!

How to reduce air pollution.

Air pollution is a particularly important and difficult issue. It's particularly important because all living things require air to live and because dirty air causes lung disease and cancer in humans; it poisons rivers and lakes; damages trees; and kills wildlife. Polluted air is a particularly difficult issue because 1) it's not something we can easily get away from, 2) it's not always easy to see, 3) it affects so many living things, 4 the winds carry it into areas not responsible for polluting it, and 5) there are many ways nature and man pollute the air - both indoors and outside.

Natural air pollution results from forest and grass fires, wind-driven dust storms, and volcanic activity. Man made pollutions comes in forms such as acid rain, smog, and flyash (the ash particles that result from the coal-based generation of electricity). Air pollution is aggravated because of four developments: increasing traffic, growing cities, rapid economic

development and industrialization.

With an increased emphasis on energy-efficient housing, modern homes have less ventilation and an increasing problem with indoor pollutants from volatile organic compounds like solvents and chemicals found in products like perfumes, air fresheners, furniture polish, moth repellents; tobacco smoke; pesticides; biological pollutants such as allergens; formaldehyde; asbestos; and radon.

More than 100 US cities still violate federal clean-air standards, mainly because of the increase in the number of automobiles and the trend toward SUVs.

How to deal with the garbage we create.

The average American generates about 4 pounds of solid trash per day. This adds up to big trouble for the environment. Americans are generating waste products faster than nature can break them down and using up resources faster than they can be replaced.

Most states are facing a crisis as garbage overburdens landfills. This situation creates groundwater and soil contamination issues.

BACK

Government Issues



- A. **What services should our government of provide.**
- B. **How can we make our government more efficient, service-oriented and accountable.**

The amount of taxes we pay for government services doesn't match the quality of service we receive. Like teacher tenure, civil service is the biggest barrier to government streamlining.

- C. **How to reduce the influence of special interest groups on elected officials that is allowed because of current campaign finance laws.**

Unless candidates for elected office are independently wealthy, they need to raise money to finance their campaign. For example, the average money spent by winning Senators is \$, by winning members of the House of Representative \$ and of a Governorship \$. State and local positions cost less but are still expensive.

The problem is twofold. First, the bulk of State and National candidate campaign money comes from Special Interest Groups. This means, and has resulted in, Special Interest Groups influencing decisions of national importance. Unfortunately, while the decisions they influence are almost always in "their" best interest, they are often not in the nation's best interest. The second half of this problem is that the Congress and the President don't have the courage to pass legislation that would stop these campaign finance practices. Why, well because these are the same individuals who accept and are elected because of the SIG money. How will it change?. Only when a real leader is elected president or until we the citizens make it an issue during elections.

BACK



How to structure a health care system that properly balances cost and human care.

Patient Care

A 2003 study in 12 metropolitan areas suggested that physicians provide appropriate health care only about half the time.

When should a pregnancy be allowed to be aborted and if so who should make that choice.

Should individuals be allowed to assist others end their lives?

Should we allow the cloning of humans?

How to allocate 'scarce' research dollars to the plethora of diseases we face.

BACK



How to deal with a litigious society that has created a liability insurance crisis and led to law suits as a way to make money and to set policy.

Frivolous lawsuits, unjustified and outrageous jury awards and the threat of litigation are destroying the integrity of our democracy and are an affront to the best in all of us.

Frivolous lawsuits waste our energies that could be spent on matters of importance. The punitive damages juries award take the heart and fairness out of our legal system. The threat of litigation is edging us closer to extortion every day. Here is a snippet from an article called [Suing Like Crazy](#) in the January 2000 Reader's Digest.

How to reduce the violence and resulting crime, particularly gun-involved crime.

It's interesting what we as a nation "accept". In the U.S., someone is rapped every 21 seconds; there is an assault every 6 minutes (isn't a rape an assault?); someone is robbed every 38 seconds; and a murder takes place every 25 minutes!

How to deal with an overburdened legal system that promotes plea-bargaining and makes a mockery of the notion of constitutionally-required speedy trials.

How do we improve the jury system so that juries are more representative of the general population.

How to balance the value of new technologies with our right to personal privacy.

How to reduce the amount of insurance fraud.

Auto Insurance Fraud

The California Department of Insurance estimates that fraud add \$330 to \$400 a year to each auto insurance policy. These frauds included the "hard" frauds where professionals scheme to cause an accident or fake an injury where innocent motorists are the victims, and the "soft" frauds where ordinary policyholders exaggerate legitimate claims, have cars intentionally "stolen" and misrepresent information on their policies.

Homeowners/Condo Insurance Fraud

What types of weapons should citizens be allowed to own/carry.

BACK



How to prevent catastrophic terrorist acts in an era where acquisition of destructive and lethal weapons and biological and chemical agents is getting easier and easier.
September 11, 2001 should have taught us a lot about how vulnerable we are to terrorism. We need to ensure that we have laws and appropriate penalties that cover the types of activities that facilitate terrorism. For instance, currently it is only a misdemeanor to create fake identification and papers. And as has been widely documented, our monitoring of individuals who are in the country on visas is virtually nonexistent.

How to create a military capability that can protect the U.S. and which can attract and maintain top-notch individuals.

How to curb the theft of American Technology.

The Department of Defense continues to be heavily criticized for being too lenient in its issuance of security clearances. A report revealed that clearances were regularly given to employees of defense contractors with long histories of financial problems, drug use, alcoholism, sexual misconduct or criminal activity.

When should the United States get involved in international crises?

How to ensure our national secrets are kept safe.

How to become less dependent upon foreign sources of oil

BACK

Social Issues



How to increase the number of Americans that vote.

xx% of Americans or approximately xxx Americans are eligible to vote. Of those eligible to vote only yy% actually register to vote. Of those who are eligible and who register to vote only zz% percent vote. That means that out of every 10 adults you see, xx of them decide our future.

How to encourage a more responsible media in a competitive environment without affecting the need for a strong free media.

How to deal with our differences in ways the ensure equal treatment and opportunities for all Americans while still encouraging our differences - and doing so without burdensome legislation.

How to ensure the privacy of each citizen in an age where technology enables the instantaneous and widespread acquisition and dissemination of personal information.

"According to United States and European intelligence experts, a massive electronic intercept program called Project Echelon scans all Internet traffic, cell phone conversations, faxes and long-distance telephone calls - virtually every type of electronic communication - looking for evidence of terrorist activity, military threats, and transnational crime." - *PC World, May 2000*

While the project's intention seems valid, the potential for misuse is huge as this intelligence project apparently operates in total secrecy.

How to ensure that each American has hope.

Texas Governor and presidential candidate George W. Bush summed up this issue well in his acceptance speech at the 1999 Republican convention.

"But our new economy must never forget the old, unfinished struggle for human dignity. And here we face a challenge to the very heart and founding premise of our nation.

A couple of years ago, I visited a juvenile jail in Marlin, Texas, and talked with a group of young inmates. They were angry, wary kids. All had committed grownup crimes. Yet when I looked in their eyes, I realized some of them were still little boys.

Toward the end of conversation, one young man, about 15, raised his hand and asked a haunting question... "What do you think of me?" He seemed to be asking, like many Americans who struggle ... "Is there hope for me? Do I have a chance?" And, frankly ... "Do you, a white man in a suit, really care what happens to me?"

A small voice, but it speaks for so many. Single moms struggling to feed the kids and pay the rent.

Immigrants starting a hard life in a new world. Children without fathers in neighborhoods where gangs seem like friendship, where drugs promise peace, and where sex, sadly, seems like the closest thing to belonging. We are their country, too.

And each of us must share in its promise, or that promise is diminished for all. If that boy in Marlin believes he is trapped and worthless and hopeless -- if he believes his life has no value, then other lives have no value to him -- and we are ALL diminished.

When these problems aren't confronted, it builds a wall within our nation. On one side are wealth and technology, education and ambition. On the other side of the wall are poverty and prison, addiction and despair."

The place in society of gay and lesbian couples as compared to heterosexual married couples.

How to cope with an increasing attitude of not taking responsible for our actions, of being victims and of getting something for nothing.

How to ensure that the gap between the haves and the have-nots get smaller, not larger.

BACK

The Paradox

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much; love too seldom, and hate too often. We learned how to make a living, but not a life; We've added years to life, not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor.

We've conquered outer space, but not inner space; we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we've split the atom, but not our prejudice; we have higher incomes, but lower morals; we've become long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are the times of tall men, and short character; steep profits, and shallow relationships.

These are the times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition.

These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes.

It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to make a difference or just hit delete.

- by Dr. Moorehead a former pastor of Overlake Christian Church in Redmond, Washington in 1990 - later published in 1995 in his book WORDS APTLY SPOKEN.

Dedicated by Nashville's 95 WSM-FM to the memories of those who lost their lives at Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999 and to the family and friends who are left behind.

BACK

2 - The Core Problem

The most pressing problem we face as a nation is that on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis, we (each of us) don't do what is necessary to keep America strong and thus free.

We aren't doing enough of the preventative things that:

- **remind us of our heritage** – like visiting a war memorial or renting a movie or reading a book that depicts the horror of war.
- **keep us involved in the democratic process** – like voting, serving on a jury or expressing our opinions to elected officials.
- **support groups that have a responsibility for keeping the country strong** – like making a donation to an organization with the country as its focus or volunteering to help out at your child's school.
- **keep individuals and families strong** – like continuing family and personal traditions, taking a course on parenting or resisting intimidation.
- **foster a sense of community** – like recycling, giving away things you don't use, donating blood or watching America's Most Wanted.
- **help us understand the workings of our government** – like attending a city council or school board meeting, going on a police ride-along or volunteering in an election campaign.

Talk is Cheap

We don't take the time from our *pursuits of happiness* to do the small things that prevent simple acts from becoming incidents, and incidents from becoming trends, and trends from becoming almost irreversible national issues like the ones noted in the previous chapter. We don't seize the moment. We simply don't spend enough time on our country. America is not on our list of priorities and the results show. And please don't think this is a patriotic message – it's not. It's a message of *survival*.

Oh, most of us would say we "love America", that we care about this country. Many of us get a nice feeling when we hear Lee Greenwood's "Proud to be an American" or when an American athlete or team does well in an international competition, or when we hear a moving rendition of the National Anthem at a sporting event or Ray Charles' rendition of America the Beautiful. But saying we care is often about as far as we go. David Viscott, a nationally renown psychiatrist and radio talk show host, cautioned callers questioning whether a particular person really loved them or not to "trust what people do and not what they say". And, for the most part, we don't act like we care about this country. We pledge our allegiance, but we don't often show our allegiance!

Brian Shul is a Vietnam era USAF fighter pilot with 212 combat missions. He was shot down near the end of the war and was so badly burned that he was given next to no chance to live. He did live, went on to fly SR-71s and completed a 20 year career in the Air Force. He has

written four books on aviation and runs a photo studio. In a [speech](#) he made in Chico California in the aftermath of the September 11th attack on the U.S., he said:

"These murdering fanatics came into our land, lived amongst our people, flew on our planes, crashed them into our buildings, and killed thousands of our citizens. And nowhere along their gruesome path were they questioned or stopped. The joke is on us. We allowed this country to become soft.

We shouldn't really be too surprised that this could happen. Did we really think that we could keep electing officials who put self above nation and this would make us stronger? Did we really think that a strong economy adequately replaced a strong intelligence community? Did we imagine that a President who practically gave away the store on his watch, was insuring national security? While our country was mired in the wasted excess of a White House sex scandal, the drums of war beat loudly in foreign lands, and we were deaf. Our response was to give the man two terms in office, and even then barely half the American public exercised their right to vote. We have only ourselves to blame. Our elected officials are merely a reflection of our own values and what we deem important."

He is right on target!

Repairing Large Cracks is Costly

What about times of national crisis and wars? During those times it is easy to focus our attention, to galvanize our energies and to act on behalf of the country. But when problems have become serious enough for a war, the price we must pay to maintain our freedoms is extraordinary – lost lives, broken families, unfulfilled dreams, enemies made, worthy goals delayed and life-long psychological problems.

The daughter of a firefighter lost in the [September 11th attack](#) was asked what was the hardest for her was. She said knowing that she'll never be able to call anyone "dad".

While the September 11th attack on the United States may not have been preventable, it is clear that many government agencies, elected officials, corporations and citizens had done, or not done, things that enabled this cowardly and horrific attack.

Freedoms not Guaranteed

The freedoms and way of life we enjoy in this country are not guaranteed. Nowhere in the stars is it written that America will be free. It took a tremendous amount of determination, risk and sacrifice to get to where we are today. Keeping this country free takes constant attention and sacrifice. If we don't give enough of it, future generations will have to give proportionally more to undo the damage of our neglect and lack of attention. You know what this is all about? The old MIDAS muffler slogan, "Pay me now or pay me later."

Click PLAY to hear the mother of U.S. soldier sent to Iraq as part of Desert Storm read a letter from her son.

Examples of Our Inaction (A.K.A. How the cracks get started and grow)

Here are some examples of our inaction and lack of caring:

1. How many of us vote, and for those who do, how knowledgeable are we of who or what we have voted for?
2. What do we do when friends tell racial or ethnic jokes or brag about their drug use?
3. What do we do when someone asks borrow a copy of our computer software?
4. What do we do when we see someone empty their ashtray in a parking lot?
5. What do we do about gangs that kill innocent bystanders, intimidate their neighbors and create untenable educational environments?
6. What do we do to remedy a legal system that allows a criminal who hurt himself while trying to escape to sue and receive an outrageous damage award?
7. What do we do to stop the flow of thousands of illegal (not legal!) aliens who pour into our country and individuals who enter with visas but never leave?
8. How many corporations and individuals go out of their way to avoid jury duty.— Yes, jury DUTY, the responsibility part of freedom?
9. How often does a company take action against an employee who commits a crime against that company or even let someone go or fire them when their efforts are substandard? No, an employee is only fired when they turn the company in for fraud or illegal actions.

A few years back, there was a news story about students at a large Texas university who ran up \$5 million of phone charges on someone else's "calling card." The long distance company said if the money was paid back, no charges would be pressed!

10. And let's not overlook sports and entertainment. How many chances has baseball given to former baseball players (and drug addicts) Steve Howe and Daryl Strawberry and the same for Robert Downey Jr.
11. How many of us boycott products and services that are advertised in a misleading way?
12. And how often do we give credit to, and support, others who do take action on behalf of the country. The Giraffe Project is a group that does just that — they publicize

individuals who stick their neck out for the rest of us.



It all comes down to us — in a democracy we can chose to be, or not to be, in charge — if *we* the people don't take charge, then the special interests step in to fill the void and the cracks get bigger.

If there is any doubt as to whether the cracks are getting bigger and that each of us needs to be more involved, check out this 11 minute musical [collage from 9-11!](#) It is a beautiful and moving piece of work.

The problems in this country are our responsibility. We have allowed them to become as large as they are and by allowing them, we condone them. If we don't care, who will? If we don't love this country, who will love America? Two lines from the song America (a.k.a. — My Country 'tis of Thee) have always seemed so poignant and provide all the motivation any of us should need to be responsible citizens.

*"Sweet land of liberty ...
.. Land where my fathers died"*



Speech by Brian Shul in Chico California in the Fall of 2001

Brian Shul is a Vietnam era USAF fighter pilot with 212 combat missions. He was shot down near the end of the war and was so badly burned that he was given next to no chance to live. He did live, went on to fly SR-71s and completed a 20 year career in the Air Force. Has written four books on aviation and runs a photo studio. This is a speech he made in Chico California in the aftermath of the September 11th attack on the U.S.

"Thank you for the opportunity to address this rally today. It is not often that a fighter pilot is asked to be the keynote speaker.

There is a rumor that they are unable to put two sentences together coherently. I'd like to dispel that rumor today by saying that I can do that, and in fact that I have written several books. I always wanted to be an author, and I ARE one now.

I'm a pretty lucky person really. I'm like the little boy who tells his father that when he grows up he wants to be a jet pilot, and his father replies, "Sorry son, you can't do both". I made that choice a long time ago and flew the jets. I was fortunate to live my dream, and then some. I survived something I shouldn't have, and today, tell people that I am 28 years old, as it has been that long since I was released from the hospital. It was like I received a second life, and in the past 28 years, I have gotten to see and do much, so much that I would not have thought possible.

Returning to fly jets in the Air Force, flying the SR-71 on spy missions, spending a year with the Blue Angels, running my own photo studio.... and so much more. And now, seeing our country attacked in such a heinous way.

Some of you here today have heard me speak before, and know that I enjoy sharing my aviation slide show. I have brought no slides to show you, as I feel compelled today, to address different issues concerning this very difficult time in our nation's history.

I stand before you today, not as some famous person, or war hero. I am far from that. You know, they say a good landing is one you can walk away from, and a really great one is when you can use the airplane again. Well, I did neither...and I speak to you today as simply a fellow American citizen.

Like you, I was horrified at the events of September 11th. But I was not totally surprised that such a thing could happen, or that there were people in the world who would perpetrate such deeds, willingly, against us. Having sat through many classified briefings while in the Air Force, I was all too aware of the threat, and I can assure you, it has always been there in one form or another. And those of you who have served in the defense of this nation, know all too well the response that is needed. In every fighter squadron I was in, there was a saying that we knew to be true, that said, when there was a true enemy, you negotiate with that enemy with your knee in his chest and your knife at his throat.

Many people are unfamiliar with this way of thinking, and shrink from its ramifications. War is such a messy business, and there are many who want no part of it, but rush to bask in the security blanket of its victory.

I spent an entire military career fighting Communism, and was very proud to do so. We won that war, we beat one of the worst scourges to humankind the world has known. But it took a great effort, over many years of sustained vigilance and much sacrifice by so many whose names you will never know. And perhaps our nation, so weary from so long a cold war, relaxed too much and felt the world was a safer place with the demise of the Soviet

Union. We indulged ourselves in our own lives, and gave little thought to the threats to our national security.

You know, normally my talks are laced with numerous jokes as I share my stories, but I have very few jokes to tell this afternoon.

These murdering fanatics came into our land, lived amongst our people, flew on our planes, crashed them into our buildings, and killed thousands of our citizens. And nowhere along their gruesome path were they questioned or stopped. The joke is on us. We allowed this country to become soft.

We shouldn't really be too surprised that this could happen. Did we really think that we could keep electing officials who put self above nation and this would make us stronger? Did we really think that a strong economy adequately replaced a strong intelligence community? Did we imagine that a President who practically gave away the store on his watch, was insuring national security? While our country was mired in the wasted excess of a White House sex scandal, the drums of war beat loudly in foreign lands, and we were deaf. Our response was to give the man two terms in office, and even then barely half the American public exercised their right to vote. We have only ourselves to blame. Our elected officials are merely a reflection of our own values and what we deem important.

Did we not realize that America had become a laughing stock around the world? We had lost credibility, even amongst our allies. To our enemies we had no resolve. We made a lot of money, watched a lot of TV, and understood little about what was happening beyond our shores. We were, simply, an easy target.

But we are a country awakened now. We have been attacked in our homeland. We have now felt the reality of what an unstable and dangerous world it truly is. And still, in the face of this unprecedented carnage in our most prominent city, there are those who choose to take this opportunity to protest, and even burn the flag.

If I were the regents or alumni of certain large universities in this county, I would be embarrassed to be producing students of such ignorance and naïve notions. Like mindless sheep, they march with painted faces and trite sayings on signs, blissfully ignorant of the world they live in, and the system that protects them, hoping maybe to make the evening news. Perhaps if they had spent more time in class they would have learned that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it. They might have learned that all it takes for evil to succeed in the world, is for good people to stand by and do nothing. If they had simply gone back in history as recently as the Viet Nam War, they would have learned that an enemy that knows it can never defeat us militarily, will persist as long as there is dissent and disruption in our land.

Their ignorance can be understood, as their young empty minds have been filled with the re-written history tripe that tenured leftist professors can spew out with no fear of removal. But the unwitting aid they provide the enemy, in disrupting the national resolve, is unforgivable. I think this is wonderful country, though, that gives everyone their voice of dissent. I am all for people expressing their views publicly because it makes it much easier for us to identify the truly foolish, and to know who cannot be counted on in times of crisis. These are the weak and cowardly who, when the enemy is crashing through the front door, will

cower in the back room, counting on better men than themselves to make and keep them free. Well, the enemy is at our front door, and isn't it interesting those who cry loudest and most often for their rights, are usually those least willing to defend it.

I heard a student on TV the other day say that this war just wasn't in his plans and he would simply head to Canada if a draft occurred. Just wasn't in his plans. I wonder what plans the young men at the beaches of Normandy had that they never got to live. I wonder if it was in the plans of 19-year-old boys in Viet Nam to lie dying in a jungle far from home. I guess the men and women at Pearl Harbor one morning had their plans slightly rearranged too. Gee, I hope we haven't inconvenienced this student. Those people in the World Trade Center have no more plans. It is up to us to have a plan now. And it isn't going to be easy. Who ever said it would? Just what part of our history spoke of how easy it was to form a free nation? It has never been easy and has always required vigilance and sacrifice, and sometimes war, to preserved this union. If it were easy, everyone would have done it. But no one else has, and we stand alone as the most unique country on earth.

And isn't it amazing that we have spent a generation stamping God out of our schools and government, and now as a nation, have collectively turned to God in memorial services, prayer vigils and churches around this country.

I am also very disturbed to hear that there are people in this country, at this particular time, who feel it inappropriate to wear the flag on their lapel because they are on the news or in a public job, and school officials who want to remove pro-American

stickers so as not to offend foreign students. Well I am offended that these people call themselves Americans. I am offended that innocent people were killed in a mass attack of unthinkable proportions. And I am offended at listening to TV broadcasters speak to me condescendingly, with a bias that screams of their drowning in a cesspool of political correctness. I pity the person who thinks they are going to remove this flag from my lapel.

This flag of ours is the symbol of all that is good about this country. America is an idea. It is an idea lived, and fought for, by a people. We are America, and this is our symbol. We are imperfect in many ways, but we continue to strive toward the ideal our forefathers laid down for us over 225 years ago. I could never imagine desecrating that symbol. Perhaps there are many people in this nation who have never been abroad, or in harms way, and seen the flag upon their return. Those poor souls can never know the deep pride and honor one feels to see it wave, to know that there is still a good ol' USA. With all our warts we are still the greatest nation on earth, and the flag is the most powerful symbol of that greatness. When I was in grade school, we used to say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. It is something I never forgot. I wonder how many children even know that pledge today.

This flag is our history, our dreams, our accomplishments, indelibly expressed in bright red, white, and blue. This flag was carried in our Revolutionary War, although it had many less stars. But it persevered and evolved throughout a war we had no right to believe we could win. But we did, and built a country around it. This flag, tattered and battle worn, waved proudly from the mast, as John Paul Jones showed the enemy what true resolve was.

This banner was raised by the hands of brave men on a godforsaken island called Iwo Jima, and became a part of the most famous photo of the 20th Century. Those men are all dead now, but their legacy lives on in the Marine Memorial in Washington, DC. Those of you who have seen it will recall that inscribed within the stone monument are the words --- When Uncommon Valor, Was A Common Virtue --- I don't believe you'll see the words, "it was easy", anywhere on it. This flag has even been to the moon, planted there for all time by men with a vision, and the courage to see it through.

I personally know what it is to see the flag, and feel something deep inside that makes you feel you are a part of something much bigger than yourself. Laying in a hospital bed, I can vividly recall looking out the only window in the room and on Sundays, seeing that big garrison flag flying proudly in the breeze. It filled the entire window, and filled my heart with a motivation that helped me leave that bed, and enabled me to be standing here today. And many years later, while fighting another terrorist over Libya, my backseater and I outraced Khaddafi's missiles in our SR-71 as we headed for the Mediterranean, and I can still clearly see that American flag patch on the shoulder of my space suit, staring at me in the rear view mirror as we headed west, and it was a good feeling. Now don't ask me why we had rear view mirrors in the world's fastest jet. I can assure you, no one was gaining on us that day.

I am so happy to see so many flags out here today. Long may it wave.

History will judge us. How we confront this chapter of American

history will be important for the future of this great nation. This will be a war like none other we have endured. The combatants will not just be the soldier on the battlefield, but will be fought by us, the citizens. We are on the battlefield now; the war has been brought to us. We will determine the outcome of this war by how well we remain vigilant, how patient we are with tightened security, how well we support the economy, and most importantly, in the resolve we show the enemy. There are some things worth fighting for, and this country is one of them.

I pray for our leaders at this time. In the Pacific, during WW II, Admiral Bull Halsey said, "There are no great men, just great circumstances, and how they handle those circumstances will determine the outcome of history". Our future and the future of coming generations are in our hands. Wars are not won just on military fronts, but by the resolve of the people. We must remain tenaciously strong in the pursuit of this enemy that threatens free people everywhere.

I am encouraged that we will win this war. Even before the first shot was finished being fired, there were brave Americans on Flight 93, fighting back. These people were the first true heroes of this conflict, and gave their lives to save their fellow countrymen.

This nation, this melting pot of humanity, this free republic, must be preserved. This idea that is America is important enough to be defended. Fought for. Even die for. The enemy fears what you have, for if their people ever become liberated into a free society, tyrannical dictatorships will cease and he will lose power.

How can they ever understand this country of ours, so self-indulgent and diverse, yet when attacked, so united in the defense of its principals. This is the greatest country in the world because brave people sacrificed to make it that way. We are a collective mix of greatness and greed, hi-tech and heartland. We are the country of Mickey Mouse and Mickey Mantle; from John Smith and Pocahontas to John Glenn and an Atlas booster; from Charles Lindbergh to Charley Brown; from Moby Dick to Microsoft; we are a nation that went from Kitty Hawk to Tranquility Base in less than 70 years; we are rock and roll, and the Bill of Rights; we are where everyone else wants to be, the greatest nation in the world.

The enemy does not understand the dichotomy of our society, but they should understand this; we will bandage our wounds, we will bury our dead; and then we will come for you...and we will destroy you and all you stand for.

I read this quote recently and would like to share it with you:

We are pressed on every side, but not crushed,
Perplexed, but not in despair,
Persecuted, but not abandoned,
Struck down, but not destroyed.

That is from II Corinthians. Not too long ago it would have been politically incorrect to quote from the Bible. I am so happy to be politically INCORRECT. And I am so proud to be an American.

Thank you all for coming out today and showing your support for your government, and your nation. You are the true patriots, you are the soldiers of this war, you are the strength of America."

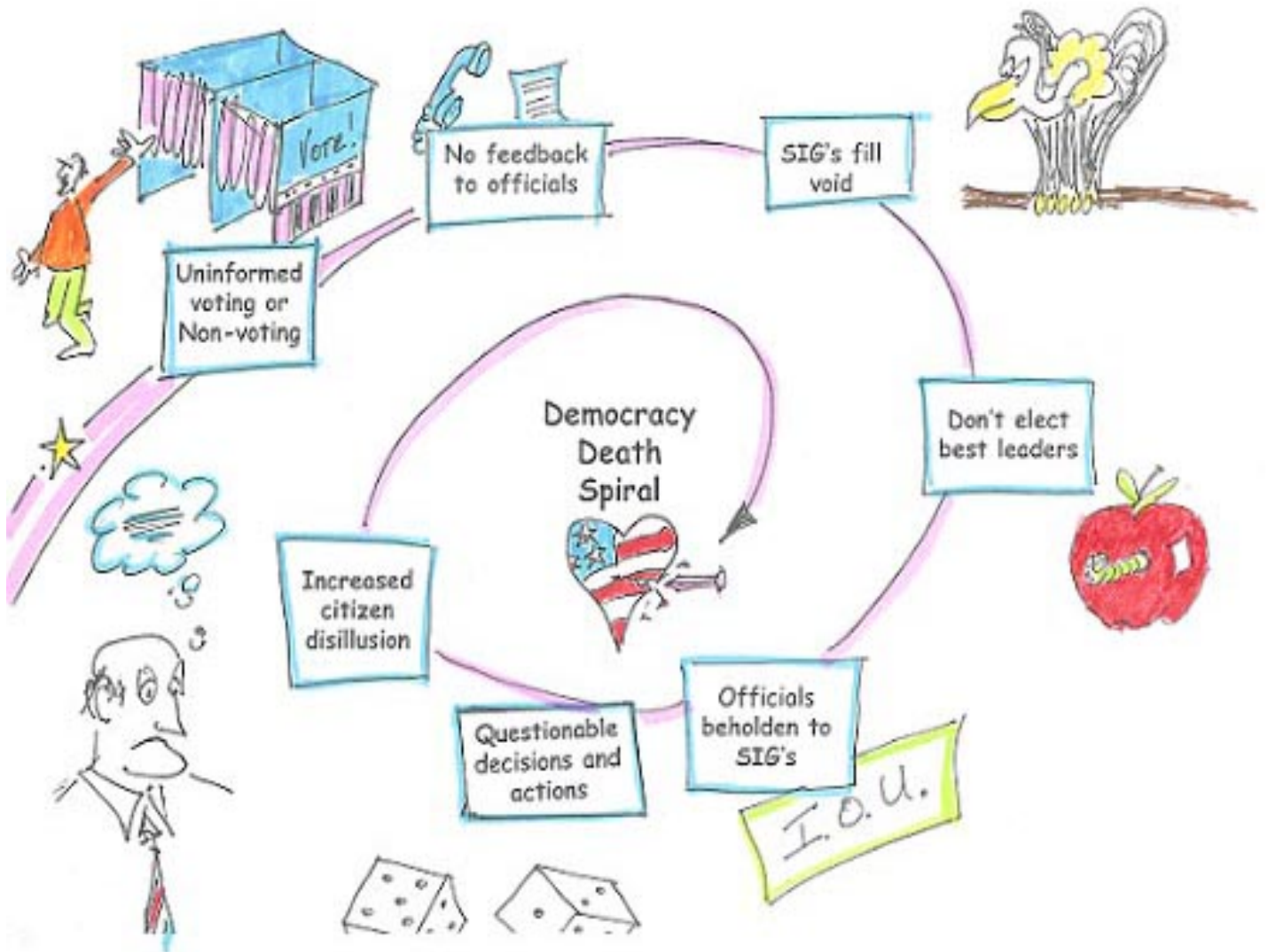
BACK

3 - The Impact of Not Caring

In a dictatorship, inaction on the part of citizens doesn't have much impact – it is the experience, morals and personal qualities of the dictator that matter. But in a democracy where the government is made up of citizens and where that government is elected by its citizens and is constitutionally obligated to act on behalf of *all* citizens, inaction by its citizens can be fatal. What happens when we don't act on behalf of the country when we need to – or really, when the country needs us to act? Cracks in the underpinnings of our democracy appear and get bigger.

The Democracy Death Spiral

The impact of a lack of attention by citizens works something like this:



1. Most of us don't vote or let public officials know how we feel about issues.
2. For those who do vote, many aren't well-informed on the issues or the candidates - and too many of us vote based upon party only or on what our friends think.

3. This lack of involvement creates a void. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) fill that void, influencing elections and decisions on issues by using the money and energies of their organizations and constituents.
4. We end up electing public officials who are not our most capable leaders and who have become beholden to the SIGs at some level.
5. These public officials then make decisions in the best interest of the SIGs rather than in the best interest of their school district, city, state or country. Getting re-elected becomes more important to many public officials than doing what is in the best interest of their constituents or country.
6. Our public officials are regrettably reluctant to change the laws that allow them to accept so much money from SIGs.
7. Meanwhile we, the citizens who didn't vote and get involved, become disillusioned with government and politicians. We don't believe we can make a difference so we become more disenfranchised. The cycle spirals downward until a major crisis occurs - like [9-11-2001](#).

And, it gets even crazier! In a number of states, a process has been established whereby citizens or organizations can get "initiatives" on the ballot. This process was put into place because state legislators have such a tough time tackling the important issues that they simply don't deal with many of them. The irony is that the same people who didn't vote, or who did vote but who weren't knowledgeable on the candidates or issues, are then asked to become knowledgeable and vote on the initiatives issues which often are complicated and on which powerful SIGs spend millions of dollars and say whatever is needed to sway voters. A number of years ago, Arizona voters faced 11 initiatives on the November ballot, which was so complicated the state had to put together a novel-sized booklet - 223 pages - as a guide.

Our Best Leaders?

I've always wondered how many of us think we elect our most capable people to public office. I recently came across the following:

" CAN YOU IMAGINE WORKING AT THE FOLLOWING COMPANY? IT HAS A LITTLE OVER 500 EMPLOYEES WITH THE FOLLOWING STATISTICS:

29 have been accused of spousal abuse
7 have been arrested for fraud
19 have been accused of writing back checks
117 have bankrupted at least two businesses
3 have been arrested for assault
71 cannot get a credit card due to bad credit
14 have been arrested on drug-charges
8 have been arrested for shoplifting
21 are current defendants in lawsuits
In 1998 alone, 84 were stopped for drunk driving

Can you guess which organization this is? Give up? The answer is the 535 members of a prior United States Congress – the same group that perpetually cranks out hundreds upon hundreds of new laws designed to keep the rest of us in line."

And what does it say about our national leaders when within the past 30 years...

- one of our presidents resigned from office because he helped cover-up a burglary.
- another president had an affair with a 21 year-old White House intern (which included having oral sex in the White House while conducting national business), was impeached for the actions he took to cover-up the affair and was then acquitted by the Senate.
- a former presidential candidate, and current senior U.S. Senator, withdrew from the nomination battle when it was revealed that he had plagiarized material for a campaign speech; had a serious plagiarism incident during his law school years; exaggerated his academic record during the campaign; and included a number of quotations in his speeches that had been pilfered from past politicians. Check out some [others who have lied](#) about their backgrounds while running for public office.
- one of our vice presidents resigned from office after being fined for income tax evasion. He had been under investigation by a U.S. attorney for allegedly receiving payoffs from engineers when he was a county executive and governor of Maryland.
- another vice president implied he had invented the internet and pronounced that having access to the internet is a civil right.

I have often wondered why any of us would want any of these individuals representing us in government much less close to the White House. And we keep re-electing them! A former mayor of the District of Columbia was corrupt, a drug user and alleged dealer. He pulled the District down to new lows and to the point where the Congress had to increase its oversight. Yet the residents this man had repeatedly betrayed kept re-electing him.

What kind of people are we allowing to be our voice? It's not that these individuals are evil or that they don't do some worthwhile things – one just wonders what this country might be like under the guidance of our very best.

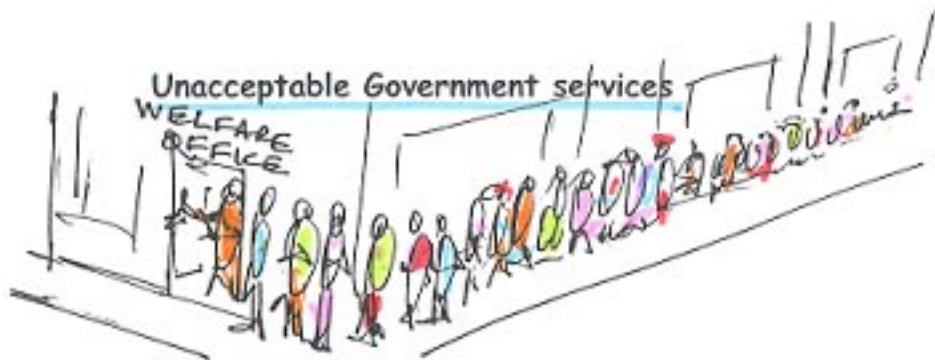
The impact on society of a bad or mediocre individual can be noticeable, but the impact of a bad or mediocre public official is profound. They make mediocre decisions, they hire and appoint mediocre individuals, they don't have the vision needed to lead, they don't have the courage to stand up for what they and the country believe in, they may not even know what they believe in, they don't have the communication skills needed to gain respect and trust of those they deal with; their integrity often is in question and they may not handle risk appropriately.

Where the Spiral Leads

Here is what happens when a democracy is comprised of apathetic citizens and mediocre public officials.

A. Unacceptable Government Services – Our governments (i.e. federal, state and local) don't provide the services and levels of service we need, and the costs of those services, as

measured in taxes, are well beyond what they could be. Most of us are familiar with the bureaucracy.



As someone who has consulted extensively with government agencies, I have come to believe that before we make inroads into government productivity, much less "reinvent government", the civil service laws must be revised or thrown out. The current regulations make it too hard to

attract top talent and to weed out non-performers. The regulations create bureaucracy and mediocrity.

B. Vulnerability to Outside Influences – Our country becomes more vulnerable to groups and countries with different interests than ours. After a recent plane crash involving a foreign carrier, the foreign government and many of its citizens protested a preliminary finding that the cause may have been an intentional act by the foreign pilot. We've heard almost nothing of this crash since – pretty unusual. During the late 1990's, there were numerous stories and charges that our government had been unduly influenced by the Chinese with campaign contributions. When we don't trust our leaders, we wonder if decisions to involve us in foreign conflicts are the correct choice or if there are ulterior motives.



C. Injustices to our Citizens – Citizens, and many times companies, incur unnecessary, and sometimes outrageous, injustices. Corrupt law enforcement officers setup innocent individuals; juries and judges and attorneys with personal and political agendas use those agendas, rather than the actual law, to carry out justice; citizens, and even states, sue large corporations because they have deep pockets.



D. Loss of Trust in our Government - With the news

full of stories of corrupt public officials, elected representatives that lie, monies ill-spent etc., we lose trust in our government



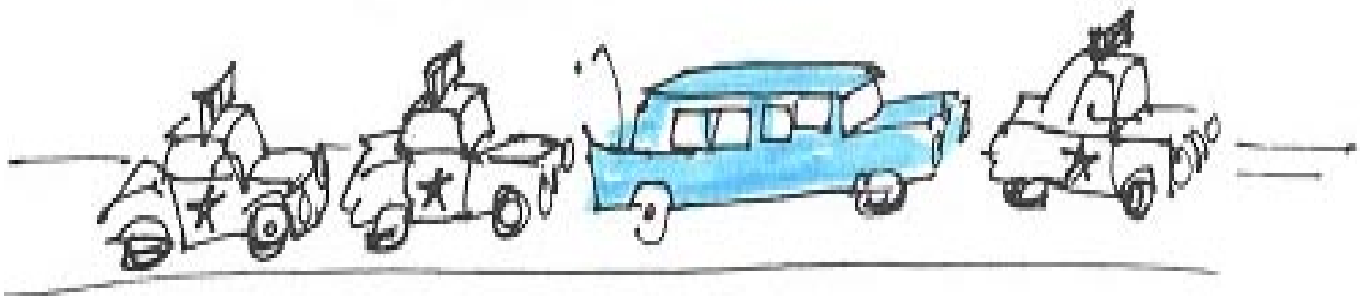
— and in some way in ourselves which makes sense since they are supposed to be one-and-the-same. Trusting the individuals we elect and the individuals they subsequently appoint and hire who are in positions of power is essential in a democracy. When we lose trust in our government, we lose our government.

E. Freedoms Eroded – The freedoms we cherish, and unfortunately often take for granted, slowly, ever so slowly, erode from our lack of care. The change is imperceptible, but certain. Some examples:

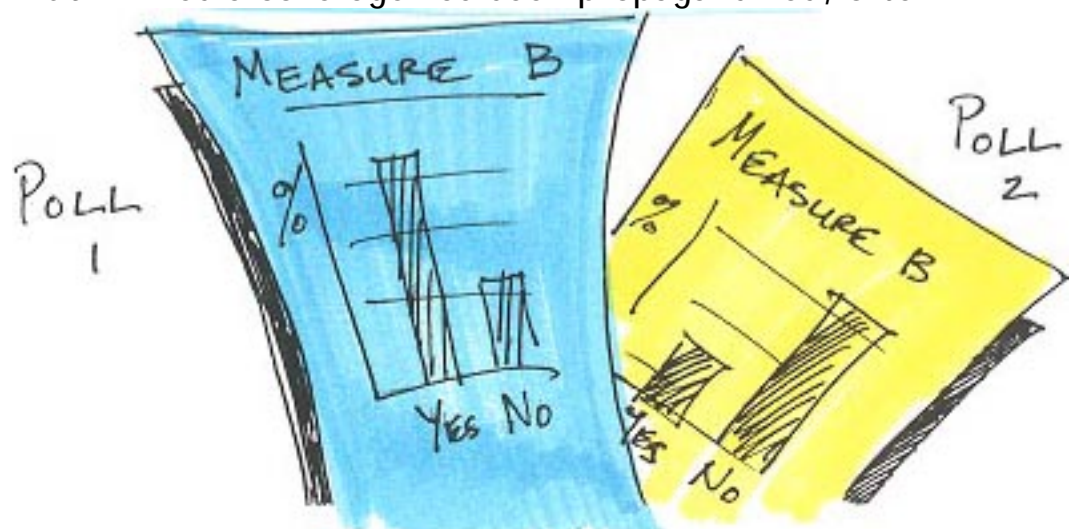
- **Freedom to Enjoy Events** – The Santa Monica California City Council voted to cancel the Fourth of July fireworks due to violence in previous years. In Detroit, dangerous going out on 4th night as many individuals fire guns into air to celebrate. Families aren't able to enjoy some of our professional sporting events. Some baseball teams have had to close their bleacher sections because of profanity and rowdiness. The players themselves are often the target of thrown objects. In December 2001, fans in Cleveland threw bottles and cans at referees over a decision they didn't like. After Lakers won NBA championship in 2000, riots broke out around the Staples center.



- **Freedom of Movement** – We've lost some freedom of movement.



1. Because we haven't enforced our immigration laws, travel between San Diego and Los Angeles, and other border areas as well, have delays at Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) checkpoints.
 2. Many communities have sobriety checkpoints.
 3. Movement through airports is hampered with security checkpoints.
 4. Simple day-to-day movements of some minorities, in some instances, are hampered by law enforcement individuals who abuse their power.
 5. Gated communities make visiting friends more difficult.
 6. Women at many universities must consider using security guard escorts when on campus in the evenings.
 7. In areas where convicted child molesters and sex offender are released, parents often keep their children inside rather than let them outside to play.
 8. Congestion in many U.S. cities and the surrounding urban areas significantly impacts work commutes and the ability of residents and others to get around.
- **Freedom to Know the Truth** – Media coverage has been propagandized, often designed to disguise or distort the truth. All too often, national security is used to protect the facts from being disclosed to the American people. Polls also confuse reality and have a big influence on the opinions of the population. Polling organizations ask questions about which most citizens have only minimal factual information. They then publish the results of the polls with an air of reality and validity that they simply don't have.



has crept into our lives, it becomes *frightening*. There are some neighborhoods where few of us would ever go at night. Walks in our own neighborhoods alone at night are almost a thing of the past except in lighted areas. Fear for our personal safety and that of our personal property is evident with the booming security industry with locks, security alarms, personal defense products, neighborhood watch programs, gated communities and self-defense classes. When was the last time we slept with our doors or windows unlocked? Some of our children aren't even safe at home with their own parents! Who hasn't had the momentary thought that a freeway tailgater might shoot when he finally passes you? Or the sense of horror that those of us with young children feel at the prospect of having our child abducted at a shopping mall? The anger level in our society seems at an all-time high.



Here are some [Home Security Tips](#) from the Irvine, California Police Department.

- **Freedom to Enjoy the Natural World** – Light and air pollution take away the darkness of our nights and hid our universe. Water pollution keeps us from enjoying our beaches and rivers. Development and growth transform county-sides into towns and cities and wilderness into national and state parks. As we continue to deplete our natural resources, I am reminded of the last verse of Gerald Manley Hopkins' Inversnaid.



"What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet."

- **Freedom of Speech** – The notion of political correctness has eroded our ability to

speaking freely without threat of harm. When special interest groups hear something they don't like, they put pressure on the individual or the organization for whom the individual is associated. Many times these organizations don't have the courage to stand up for the right of an individual to speak freely and the organization often reprimands or terminates the individual, impugns reputation, let go... When we don't get involved, we let these special interest groups dictate what is acceptable. [Check out some examples.](#) █



F. Deprived of Sense of Country – We've allowed the media to focus on the cosmetic and sensational rather than the substantive side of issues. And I don't know about you, but I am tired of seeing the party affiliations of elected officials, like Senator Bill Bradley (D), New Jersey, or Senator J. C. Watts (R) Oklahoma, or Governor Jesse Ventura (I), Minnesota. When does an elected official become an (A) – an American – again? And in some important way, we've been deprived of our President.



Does it bother you that the President can't deliver the State of the Union address without an immediate, televised response from the opposing political party? He is President of the United States, not president of the Republican or Democratic or Reform party.

Government "by and for" Special Interest Groups

When we don't participate, our government – of, by and for the people – impersonally becomes THE government – of, by and for special interests. When was the last time you heard someone refer to government as OUR government? It's always THE government, Washington, or the [name of the President's administration]. Why? It's not *ours* anymore. Special Interest Groups act and do get involved, but on their own behalf, not ours. The country isn't their primary interest; their existence, revenue, popularity and market share are what motivate them.

I heard on the radio recently that many consider this Congress to be one of the most heavily influenced by special interest groups. It shouldn't be a surprise as Congress is heavily funded

by Political Action Committees (PAC) — just one of many types of SIGs. Do you know there are approximately 4,200 PACs providing one-third of all campaign financing and that almost exclusively to incumbents. How many bills passed by our local, state and federal governments do you think are in the best interest of the country? It can't be many, considering the strength of PACs and the fact that only about 40% of the people vote. You have to believe that our elected representatives have some interest/obligation to that special interest groups' cause. Citizens are supposed to be, and *need* to be, the Special Interest Group for America.

Former Senator Paul Trible surprised Virginians years ago by announcing that he would not seek a second term. One of the reasons he cited was that "...for all the Senate's greatness, much of the important work of the nation doesn't seem to get done."

In an LA Times article, former U.S. congressman Dan Lundgren, who was former California Governor Deukmejian's nominee for State Treasurer, gave a similar view: "If people want to know why we get deficits, it's because all the special interests beat up on their elected representatives and say, 'We need to have the deficit spending.' To hell with the rest of the country."

They are right. Special interests stagnate the country. They divert our energies and take us off track. They push us toward mediocrity.



Home Security Tips

- Always keep doors and windows secured while at home or away.
- Never answer the door to strangers. Educate children to never answer the door without an adult present - even if they know the visitor.
- If you don't already have one, install a viewer (peephole) in your door.
- Insist on identification from repair and sales persons. If in doubt, call their company to verify identification.
- Keep your home well lighted, both indoors and outdoors.
- Never come home to a dark residence. Have porch lights and indoor lights set on a timer.
- Never leave spare key(s) hidden outside. Instead, issue spare key(s) to a trusted neighbor.
- Place a wood rod or dowel (3/4 inch) in the top track of sliding glass doors or windows.
- Use secure locks on windows and doors.
- If you have a door leading directly to your home from your garage, keep that door locked and secured at all times.
- Do not admit persons asking to use your telephone. Offer to make the call for them.
- Know your neighbors and your neighborhood. Call your local law enforcement agency for information on joining Neighborhood Alert or starting a Neighborhood Alert Program in your neighborhood or apartment complex.
- Identify your belongings by engraving your driver's license number on your possessions.
- If you return home and find a door or window open, or see signs of forced entry, do not enter. Go to a neighbor's home and immediately phone your local police department.
- Use automatic timers to turn lights on and off, giving the appearance that you are home.
- Stop mail and other deliveries when on vacation, or ask a neighbor to pick up your mail,

newspapers, or advertisements left on your door or entry gate.

- If you live in an apartment or condominium, be attentive and careful if you are alone in the laundry room or garage.
- Have all locks re-keyed when moving into a new home.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers near the telephone.
- Teach children the proper use of 9-1-1- for police, fire or medical emergencies.

Examples of Our Lose of "Freedom of Speech"

Saturday, March 16,
2002
FOX NEWS

SOUTH ROYALTON, Vt. — The fight over "vanity plates" is heating up around the country, with DMV officials and drivers duking it out over license wording like "IRISH1" and "ATHEIST."

In Vermont, a few days before St. Patrick's Day, a woman dressed from head to toe in green argued before the state Supreme Court that she had the right to have "IRISH1" emblazoned on her license plate. The Department of Motor Vehicles said the plate violated its rule against references to ethnic groups.

And DMV employees in Florida have suddenly decided to revoke the "ATHEIST" plate they issued to the vice president of Atheists of Florida 16 years ago, on the grounds that the label is "obscene or objectionable."

It's a battle seen in several states grappling with where to draw the line between free expression and words that might offend or serve as an invitation to trouble.

The Vermont "IRISH1" driver, Carol Ann Martin, made her case before the Supreme Court in a pale green dress and bright green headband decorated with shamrocks and a leprechaun.

"The people of this state want to have words or phrases on their license plates that are positive and meaningful to them," Martin said after the hearing. "What's wrong with 'Irish?'"

The Florida man arguing for an "ATHEIST" plate, Steven Miles, has been cruising around Gainesville for more than a decade-and-a-half and said the license plate is a valid form of self-expression.

But last month, the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles wrote him a letter telling him it now considers the license tag "obscene or objectionable."

That puts the personalized plate on the department's blacklist, right up there with epithets, expletives and words describing certain body parts.

"The plate must be canceled," the letter stated. Miles was ordered to send the plate back in the letter.

Miles, 55, said giving up his tag is out of the question.

"It's kind of disconcerting to know that the United States is based on freedom of expression, yet in actuality, it's quite restrictive," Miles, an electrical engineer at the University of Florida, told the *St. Petersburg Times* in an article published Thursday.

The review was prompted by a complaint signed by 10 people, said DMV spokesman Robert Sanchez. A supervisor in the Bureau of Titles and Registrations in Tallahassee sided with the protesters and decided to yank the plate.

Department officials routinely refuse to issue blatantly offensive personalized tags. But pulling them off the street is rare.

In Ohio, the fight has been over a proposed plate saying "H8 MICH," a criticism either of nearby Michigan or its sports teams. The motor vehicle agency automatically rejects all requests for "hate" — "H8" — plates, as well as those that include profanity, drug references and ethnic slurs.

"WINE" was the license plate at issue before the Oregon Supreme Court on Thursday. Michael Higgins, a 65-year-old retired wine merchant, went to court after his applications for plates saying "WINE," "IN VINO" and "VINO" were rejected. Oregon's motor vehicle agency bans references to alcohol, tobacco or drugs, along with vulgar or sex-related words.

Higgins' question is this: "Why shouldn't people be able to put anything on a vanity plate that they can put on a bumper sticker?"

Bonnie Rutledge, Vermont's motor vehicles commissioner, said license plates are state property, and their main purpose is to identify vehicles.

"That is not really the purpose of a license plate — to put out your own personal message," she said.

Under Vermont law, the commissioner can reject an application for a vanity plate that "might be offensive or confusing to the general public."

For example, Paula Perry of East Montpelier recently lost her bid to have "SHTHPNS" on her license plates. It's not what you might think: Perry said it stood for "shout happiness."

At issue are rules the commissioner issued interpreting the law. Barred are "combinations of letters or numbers that refer in any language to a race, religion, color, deity, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation, disability status or political affiliation."

Rutledge said the rules are stricter than they used to be — "IRISH" is on a set of Vermont plates right now, for example.

At the Vermont Supreme Court hearing, Chief Justice Jeffrey Amestoy asked if a strict reading of the word "color" on the forbidden list might bar someone from having a plate that said "BLUE."

John Bloomer, Martin's lawyer, expanded on that point in a later interview. "Under the current rule you

can have 'GO SOX' but not 'GO RED SOX' and not 'GO YANKS," he said.

The hearing had its lighter moments, including when Justice James Morse asked about more indirect ethnic references and referred to the word "SHAMROCK" on a license plate.

"I think this close to March 17, it probably would be fine," Griffin said to a laugh from the audience.

He needn't worry: "SHAMROCK" is eight letters and vanity plates are limited to seven.

Atheists of Florida's Miles thinks his First Amendment rights are being violated. He said he intends to fight back and has been in touch with the American Civil Liberties Union.

"For the department to claim or state that the word 'atheist' is offense or objectionable is something to be upset about," he said.

Sanchez said a letter in support of Miles is prompting the DMV to take a second look. But if Miles is unsatisfied with their final decision, he has an alternative, Sanchez said.

"There is a venue for people's free speech on automobiles and that's a few inches below the license plate," he said. "That's a bumper sticker."

The state once tried to keep offensive material off bumpers, too. But that effort was thrown out by the courts.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

4 - Why We Don't Get Involved

One of the interesting dichotomies of a democracy is that while a democracy needs participation from its citizens to sustain itself, its citizens are free not to participate. There are a variety of reasons why we aren't participating and aren't fulfilling our responsibilities as citizens. Understanding them may help us choose to participate more.

Removed from Past Crises

First, we become removed from past crises and forget what it has taken to get to the lifestyle we currently enjoy. We forget what it takes to sustain a democracy. Life becomes too good, and we lose our sense of urgency. The Israeli people make a point of keeping the horrific memories of The Holocaust alive. The controversial Jewish Defense League's motto "Never Again" is a poignant reminder of the past. We even diminish the importance of some of the country's special holidays by adjusting them to create long weekends.



How To Participate?

Second, we are not taught the importance of, and how to, participate. During our formal education, we are often taught American history – important facts. And throughout our lives we often hear about our "rights" – all perfectly correct and good. Yet there is rarely any formal education about citizenship, nor is much attention given throughout our lives to learning our responsibilities as citizens.



We're not taught the reality that freedom isn't *free*, that it requires tremendous and constant energy. We aren't taught that we have a responsibility to our country. We not only have "inalienable rights," but we have "inalienable obligations," even though they aren't spelled out in any of our founding documents.

Brandon Stoddard, a former head of ABC programming, in discussing the "onslaught of protest against "Amerika," an ABC network made-for-TV mini series, said, "I think it can make people ask some questions about their behavior as citizens. It might even make them think about the responsibility part of freedom."

Just Getting Along

Third, we are brought up to get along and not to confront issues when they occur. It's called adaptation. We are not taught how to address issues without confrontation. Here's another quote from the "Amerika" mini series: "These Americans, after all, are not can-do patriots, but meek dispirited folks who simply want to get along. Just surviving - no heroics, no strength of character, not even dignity." There may be more truth to this than we'd like to believe.



Can I Make a Difference?

Fourth, with the number of issues that need attention, we become overwhelmed and don't believe that we can make a difference. We believe that if we do get involved, there is no stopping. Intellectually we hear what individuals like Candy Lightner, the founder of [MADD](#), can do, but realistically we are not going to have that kind of global impact. The impact of our small daily actions will change the direction in which our country is headed. The importance of one person's daily actions cannot be emphasized enough. At some level, it's all that matters. Until we become "standup" citizens, our freedom will not prosper.





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

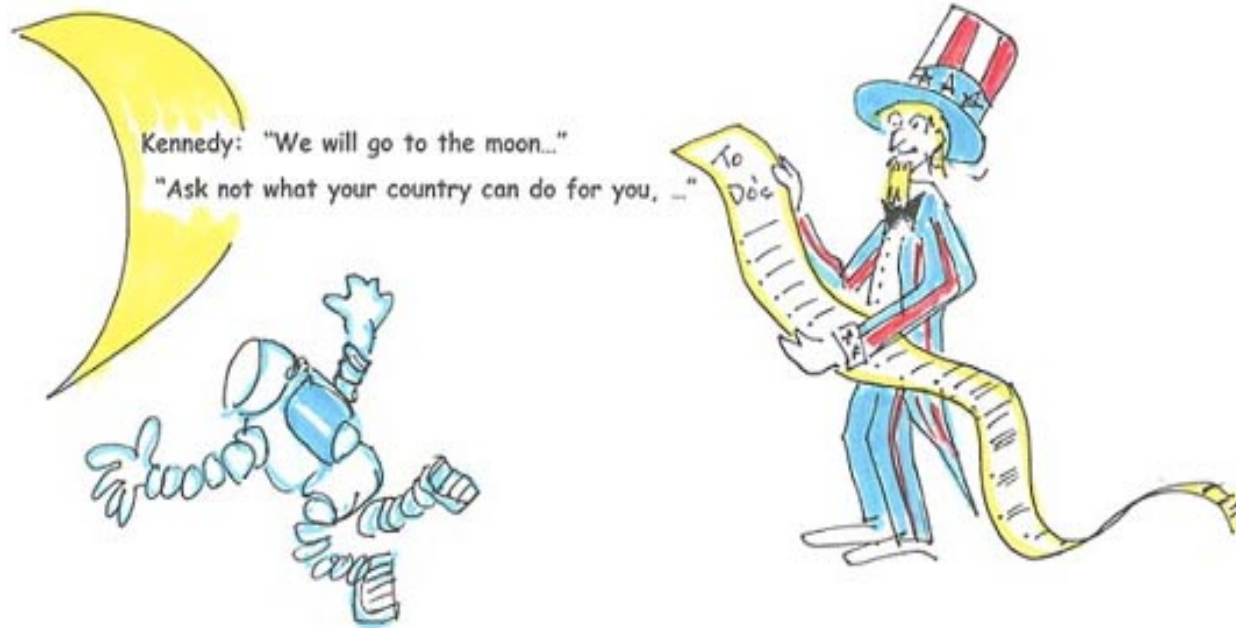


millions of first steps. Our first step is to create an awareness and recognition that a lack of involved citizenry is the problem of our time, and that it is worthy of our best resources and efforts. This awareness will occur when individuals in visible positions embrace this notion and publicize it.

Former President Bush brought some attention to the matter when, in one of his State of the Union speeches, he was on the right track when 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 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. And we don't need a war on drugs, a war on crime or a war on poverty — what we need is a war on *complacency*. I believe there is only one way to accomplish Kennedy's admonition, and that 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. Those million first steps need to be followed by millions of small steps. As General Colin Powell said in this speech at the 2000 Republican national convention, "we must do what good for America".

Our choices are clear.

- First, we need to decide individually if we believe this is a worthy cause. If you need reminding of what happens when we aren't vigilant, click on this spectacular "pictorial with Enya's Only Time music" [TRIBUTE TO THE HEROES OF 911 - Original](#) - 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 the specific actions each of us can do, so that we can do them naturally as needed. That's the purpose of this book.
- Third, we need to trust that — and understand how — doing these actions will make a difference. 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 small 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."



100 Citizen Actions

The remainder of this book focuses on 100 of those simple actions - identifying them, explaining why they matter and in some cases explaining how to go about doing them. The "citizen actions" are grouped into categories. Specifically actions that:

- [Remind Us of Our Heritage](#)
- [Keep Us Involved In the Democratic Process](#)
- [Support Groups Who Have A Responsibility for Keeping the Country Strong](#)
- [Keep Individuals and Families Strong](#)
- [Foster a Sense of Community](#)
- [Help Us Understand the Workings of Our Government](#)

Specific actions were chosen because I believe they have high impact, are specific and are relatively simple to do. I would love to know about other actions readers come up with. Please [email them](#) to me.

The End

Actions That Remind Us of Our Heritage

It is important to teach our children, and to remind ourselves, of our heritage:

- of why and how we became a nation,
- of the basic principles and documents upon which the country was founded,
- of what it took to achieve today's standard of living,
- of the mistakes we've made and,
- of the individuals and events that have played major roles in shaping the country.

Appreciating one's heritage is a prerequisite for taking actions to sustain it. Being aware of our heritage helps us to appreciate what we have and to see our shortcomings so they can be addressed.

Teach Our Children

Teaching our children about the country's heritage is important because they know no other way of life. They need to appreciate that the life they have in the United States is not a birth right - but rather it is a gift from the culmination of past generations. It took enormous courage, loss of life, pain, mistakes, hard work and risk to get here. Our children need to be made aware that they are going to be the custodians of this country and be taught how to do that well.

Remind Ourselves

Reminding ourselves of our heritage is important for similar reasons. However it has additional importance because, as we grow up and become involved in the day-to-day pursuit of our own lives, it is easy to forget that what we have isn't the norm and that a free society requires continuous vigilance and substantial energy. It is easy to become complacent. Reminding ourselves also provides the motivation and justification for active citizenship.

Here are some things each of us can do to teach our children about, and to remind ourselves of, where we came from and how we have evolved as a country.

Citizen Actions

1. [Ask an immigrant about the fears or conditions that drove them from their native country and what hopes led them to ours.](#)
2. [Attend the naturalization ceremony of new citizens.](#)
3. [Discuss the responsibilities of citizenship with your children.](#)

4. [Hang the flag on national holidays and explain their significance to your children.](#)
5. [Interview your grandparents.](#)
6. [Learn what is being taught about America at your child's school .](#)
7. [Read a book or rent a movie that depicts the sacrifices of war or what people have done to escape oppression.](#)
8. [Read the Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence.](#)
9. [Take a car trip across the country.](#)
10. [Take a course on American history.](#)
11. [Teach your children some "Americana-type" songs.](#)
12. [Teach your children the states and their capitals.](#)
13. [Travel to another country.](#)
14. [Visit a national or state park.](#)
15. [Visit an American Indian reservation - after learning about The Trail of Tears.](#)
16. [Visit a war memorial.](#)



**Reader Submitted
Actions**

Ask an Immigrant About the Fears or Conditions That Drove Them from Their Native Country and What Hopes Led Them to Ours

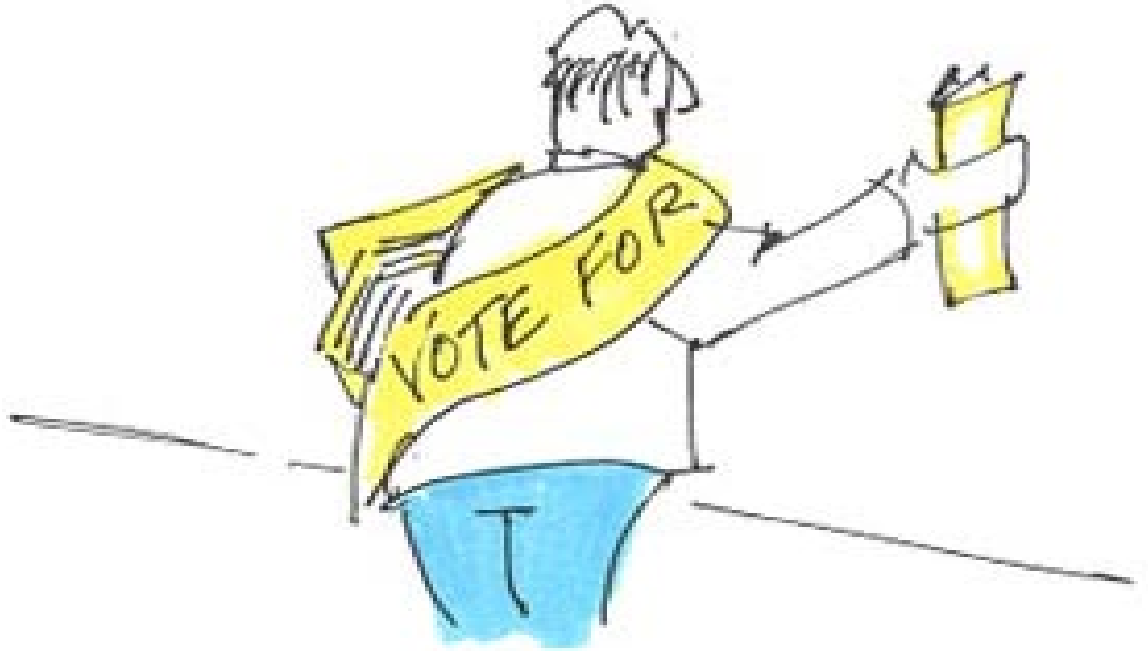


My experience is that, as a group, individuals who have immigrated to the U.S. and their first generation offspring, are more vocal and open about their appreciation for this country than those of us who were born here and whose parents were born here.

In order to get a good perspective on something, it's often necessary to go away from it or to see it from afar. One way to do that is to [travel to another country](#).

Another way to do that is to talk with individuals who have come to the U.S. from other countries.

Talking with an immigrant often gives us a better perspective of ourselves. They see good things about the country we take for granted and let us know how we are viewed by others. Their stories of what life is like in their native country may surprise you. You might want to consider arranging for a group of immigrants to speak at your child's school.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



There are hundreds of thousands of individuals around the world that would love to live in the United States. Many have done extraordinary things and made extraordinary sacrifices to get to our shores. Our [immigration laws](#) allow a number of individuals to enter the country each year for a variety of reasons and allow individuals who have been permanent residents for 5 years to become naturalized citizens.

Becoming a naturalized citizen is a dream for many of these individuals. The general process includes:

1. confirming that you are eligible using an [on-line worksheet](#).
2. filing an [Application for Naturalization](#) (form N-400), paying the filing fee and being approved by the INS.
3. getting fingerprinted.
4. an interview with the INS
5. passing a Civics Exam which includes U.S. History and government questions and the ability to write basic English - you can take an [online practice test](#).
6. taking the Oath of Allegiance at a ceremony.

The Oath of Allegiance Ceremony is many things. It's the end of a dream and the start of a new life for the person becoming a naturalized citizen, and a very emotional experience for someone who is already a citizen. Your [local INS office](#) will tell you when and where Oath ceremonies are held. Go watch and feel the sense of excitement. It does help us re-appreciate what we have.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories

Discuss the Responsibilities of Citizenship with Your Children



The Constitution and other founding documents talk mostly about our "inalienable rights". These rights are freedoms that every individual in this country should enjoy. We are in an era where the focus on our rights seems strong - and perhaps a bit out of kilter with what was intended. It seems that special interest groups, as well as individual citizens, have used the phrase "have the right to" in ways intended to serve their best interest and not the country's best interest, as intended by the founding fathers.

However, in order to have and sustain a society where its citizens are free, individuals must also have some obligations or responsibilities to that society. This book is about the *responsibility* part of freedom. Without citizen involvement, freedom is not sustainable; and without freedom, there are no inalienable rights. And while there isn't any "correct" way to be responsible, each of us is responsible for doing and acting in a way that keeps the country strong and thus free.

The best time to learn this message is, of course, when one is young. Discuss citizenship, and the rights and responsibilities that come with it, with your children. Chose a few of the citizen actions in this book that your children can accomplish. You will not only teach them good citizenship skills, but you will let them know how important citizenship is to you.

Hang the Flag On National Holidays and Explain Their Significance to Your Children



National holidays symbolize events that are significant to the nation. Celebrating them provides us with a chance to better understand, and to reflect on, those nation-changing events that took place on that day.



Unfortunately, we often celebrate national holidays on days that allow for a long weekend rather than on the day that is the anniversary of the event being recognized. This practice dilutes the significance of the holiday. Too often they have become simply a day off from work or school. [Memorial Day](#) is an example of this. It used to be always on May 30th. Then in 1971, Congress adopted the floating date for Memorial Day - the last Monday in May - to satisfy holiday schedules for federal employees.

Explaining the significance of a national holiday to your children not only educates them and shows them you are aware of the history of our country but it provides a good incentive for each of us to better understand the reason for, and events associated with, the holiday.

A nation's flag symbolizes that nation. Hanging the flag on a national holiday expresses a pride in our nation and makes a statement that we recognize the meaning and importance of the holiday. When others see our flag hung, it gives them "permission" to do the same and creates a small sense of community.

Our National Holidays

The United States Information Agency has a nice site called Portrait of American with a

section called [National Celebrations](#) which lists our national holidays and describes their significance.

The American Flag

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History has a major project underway to restore the original 30-by-42 foot, 186 year old Star-Spangled Banner. A section of their web site entitled "[Star Spangled Banner - The Flag that Inspired the National Anthem](#)" contains most anything one might want to know about the flag - its history, its design, where and how to hang it and educator information on how to incorporate the Flag into a school's curriculum.



Readers' Stories

Interview Your Grandparents



One of the best and most rewarding ways to understand how we have evolved as a country is to ask those who have lived here longest. They are often our grandparents.

Talking with one's grandparents, or other older Americans, about what the country was like when they grew up gives us:



- an appreciation for what other generations have gone through for the current generation,
- a clearer and more realistic perspective of the country's, and our own, history, and
- an opportunity to form stronger relationships with ones grandparents.

Equally important, grandparents feel good when someone values their views and wants to understand what life was like as they grew up.

Ask them what games they played as children, what their schools were like, how evenings were spent before the advent of television, dating practices, life during the depression, what they feel was the biggest contribution to society in their lifetimes (TV, radio, computers, the space race etc.). It's a unique opportunity to better appreciate the things we all take for granted. Ask them what your mom or dad was like as a child. Take a history of their lives.

A special project, the [Veteran's History Project](#), has been created by Congress to collect the stories and experiences of war veterans while they are still among us. There are 19 million war veterans living in the United States today, but every day we lose 1,500 of them. So if your parents or grandparents are veterans of a war, ask them about their memories. If you record their stories, you can send the tape and any memorabilia they may want to contribute to the Library of Congress and it will be included in the permanent archives!



Readers' Stories



We often take what we have for granted unless we know what is special about this country. Being born in America, a country with freedoms, we are not always aware of how rare, important and fragile freedom is. We sometimes learn about freedom from our parents, but it's also important that we learn about America and other countries in school.

What is taught, if anything, about America, differs from school system to school system. Also, there are pressures from special interest groups to include materials into the school curricula that support their causes - often at the expense of basic information like American history. If parents aren't aware of what's being taught, then they can't have an influence on future curriculum choices. A parent's interest also reinforces to children that education about our country's history is important.

We have a vested interest in ensuring that our children are being taught about our country - both the good and the not so good. It is critical that each generation understand and know the truth about our heritage.

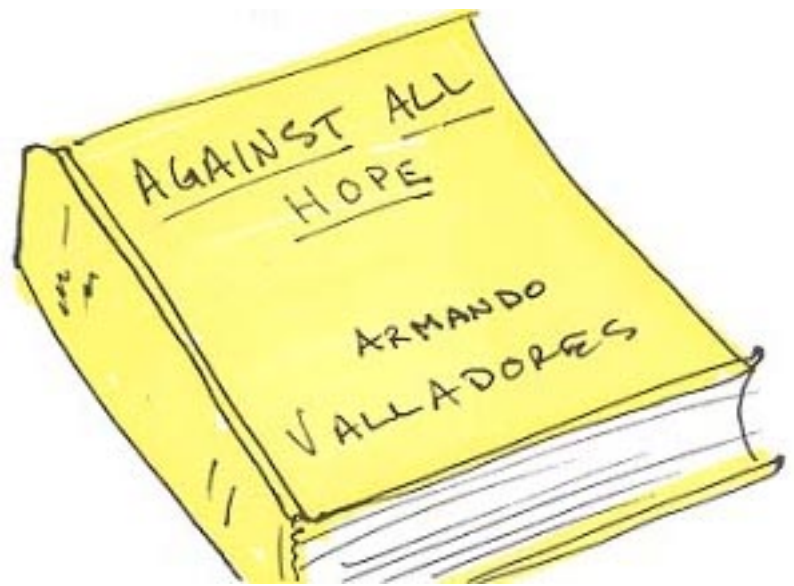


Readers' Stories

Read a Book or Rent a Movie That Depicts the Sacrifices of War or What People Have Done to Escape Oppression



For most of us, war is only a word - fortunately. One can only imagine the killing of other beings - the brutality, the maiming, the rape, the horror of hand-to-hand combat, the fear, the life long memories if one survives. Our country has been involved in .??? armed conflicts. The more each of us understands about the reality of war, the more each of us will:



1) appreciate the sacrifices prior generations have made so that we can be free, and

2) be in a better position to provide input to our country's leaders if or when the U.S. should become involved in an armed conflict.

Here are some books and movies that bring home to us the horror of war and oppression.

Books

Against All Hope - Armando Valladeras

Greatest Generation - by Tom Brokaw

World War II - A bimonthly magazine dedicated to information and stories about World War II - no web site - 800.829.3340 for subscription information

Movies

Dances With Wolves -

Glory

Saving Private Ryan

Schindler's List

Night Crossing - Two men living in East Germany who can no longer tolerate the petty tyrannies of Communist rule. Together, they formulate a daring plan to escape to democratic West Germany in a hot air balloon.

Black Hawk Down



Sites & Resources



More Examples



Readers' Stories

Read the Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence



Having a clear understanding of the basic founding documents gives us the proper perspective upon which to take actions and to believe in the actions we take.

Our heritage formally began on July 4, 1776 when the 13 united States of America declared their independence from the State of Great Britain. The [Declaration of Independence](#) describes why we broke away and suggests the kind of society the founding fathers wanted to establish in America.

The [Constitution](#) and the related [Bill of Rights](#) and other [Amendments](#) describe the laws and principles upon which our country was founded.

The [National Archives and Records Administration](#) is a good resource for finding out about and obtaining copies of important national documents.

Take a Car Trip Across the Country



Most of us grow up in only one part of the country. 61% of us live in the city area in which we were born. Our view of the rest of the U.S., naturally, is often skewed toward the environment in which we were raised. However, the reality is that the geography, the customs, the weather, the dress, the way of speaking etc. vary all across the country.

Traveling through the country allows one to appreciate the strength we have in our diversity and the country's natural beauty and to see first-hand how varied our cultures are.



Readers' Stories



Sites & Resources



When I think of this action, I am reminded of how important it is to many adopted children to find out where they came from - to find their birth parents - in an effort to help them understand who they are and how their personal history is composed. Knowing our roots helps put our life in a real perspective, even if the reality isn't what we hoped for.

Understanding the history of this country is important for similar reasons. It has taken so much to get from our colonial status in 1776 to today's modern world - wars, day-to-day hardship, courage, imagination, creativity, going against the norm. Understanding our country's history helps us see things in perspective and helps us avoid making the same mistakes in the future. It makes us aware of what it took to attain our freedoms and reminds us of what we must do to keep them.

If one doesn't appreciate what one has and what it took to attain it, it is easy not to give it the respect and attention it needs. And history has shown that when a country takes what is has for granted and begins to believe that it is entitled to what it has, decline begins. Good things are worth taking care of and what we have in this country is generally quite good.

Taking a course on American History is a good way to understand our history . Attending a course, as opposed to reading a book, gives one an opportunity to discuss historical events with others and hear other perspectives.



Sites & Resources

Teach Your Children Some Americana-type Songs



There are many wonderful songs that reflect our heritage - wonderful not only in their music but wonderful in their words and meaning. These songs, and the circumstances under which they were written, tell stories of our country's struggle for freedom, of our citizens' struggles for equality and, simply of day-to-day living. There are also wonderful renditions of many of these songs which reflect our diversity and the musical culture of our times.

Teaching your children some of these songs does a few things. It:

1. keeps the songs part of our heritage
2. passes on the messages in these songs to a new generation and
3. gives each of us a chance to remember some of these songs or to learn new ones - and in the process to be reminded of important pieces of our country's history.

The Star Spangled Banner, America the Beautiful, I've Been Workin' on the Railroad, and Swing Low Sweet Chariot are a few I remember growing up - but there are many more. What are your favorites?





Spending time teaching our children about their rich heritage, the struggles to form their country, and the ways to be a good citizen builds a background of respect for freedom and caring about its preservation.

Here are some fun ways to teach your children about their country:

- Buy a puzzle of the U.S. It reinforces the concept that our country is diverse and large.
- Have fun at dinner quizzing your children on the states. It gives them much-needed attention as well as a head start in school. Ask them:
 - to name the cities they know in a particular state
 - what the state is known for
 - what the capital is
 - what states border that state
 - what the state, tree, flower and bird are for the state you live in
- Play the license plate game in the car. See how many license plates from other states you can spot.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



No, this is not suggesting that you "love it or leave it". Sometimes the best way to get a true perspective on a place is to go away and get some distance from it. It's been said that there is nothing more special than touching down in the U.S. after having been abroad. Because most of us were born in the U.S., we often take our way of life for granted. While visiting other countries is often educational, fun and culturally interesting, it also often allows us to see how special the United States is, as well as to see the aspects that need attention.



Readers' Stories



Sites & Resources



The U.S. is a gorgeous and diverse country in terms of its geography and natural resources. There are magnificent mountains, canyons, waterfalls, lakes, rivers, deserts, caves, bayous, outcroppings, plains, marshes and on and on. While one doesn't have to visit a national park to see or appreciate the beauty of this country, many of the most spectacular of the country's natural resources have been preserved as national or state parks.

Visiting national and/or state parks gives us an appreciation for the beauty of our country, resulting in a stronger belief that it is worth taking time from our busy lives to do the simple things, that when done by all of us when the opportunities arise, keep the country strong and thus free.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



"In fourteen hundred and ninety two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue"...and landed on the shores of Massachusetts. Almost three hundred years later, a group of English citizens who had settled on the American eastern shores, fed up with unfair taxation, declared their independence from England and became the United States of America.

The history of our country is not always pretty, and this is a case in point. In expanding its territory and becoming a nation of 50 states, the United States encountered Indians - or Native Americans as they are often called. Many tribes were driven from their land, many were slaughtered and, for the most part, they were treated in a way that was unfair and unjust. But getting to know our country includes both its inspiring history and its less desirable one.

The Trail of Tears

One of the worst examples of our treatment of Native Americans occurred as a result of the "Indian Removal Act" passed in 1830. In the late 1830s, the U.S. Army forced the men, women and children of the Cherokee Nation from western Georgia to Oklahoma. This thousand mile forced march, with minimal food and facilities, resulted in enormous loss of life and come known as [The Trail of Tears](#).

Why Visit a Native American reservation?

The [American Indian Heritage Foundation](#) is a good resource for finding the locations of Native American settlements. Visiting a reservation let's "our predecessors" know that we have an interest in understanding their heritage which is part of ours and gives us an appreciation of their rich cultural, spiritual and natural beliefs. It can also give us a real perspective of what democracy can do when its citizens don't stand up for what is right.

Status of Native Americans

In the early years of the United States, Indian affairs were governed by the Continental Congress, which in 1775 created a Committee on Indian Affairs headed by Benjamin Franklin. Fifty years later, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was established under the War Department, and eventually moved to the Interior Department in 1949.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



Visiting a war memorial helps to personalize the horror and effects of war. I have been to several, and they moved and impressed me more than I imagined.

Arlington National Cemetery - Located just outside Washington, DC, on 612 acres of rolling and pastoral grounds, are the gravesites of John F. Kennedy and 200,000 other Americans who died in wars such as Vietnam, World Wars I and II, the Korean War and more recently the Gulf War. It also houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier which is guarded 24 hours a day. To be in this peaceful and beautiful setting and to see row after row after row of grave stones creates quite a solemn and reverent mood.



The Vietnam Veterans and Korean War Memorials - Both are located on the Mall in Washington, DC - and a few minutes walk from each other. Both are quite unique and moving but the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has special meaning to me because a high school friend of mine, [John Corr](#), has his name etched into that impersonal yet moving marble wall. I have never had an experience like my first visit to Wall! It is an experience of:

slowly walking along a black marble wall and seeing over 58,000 names inscribed on it representing the Americans who died during that conflict - fifty eight thousand!;

seeing the effect the wall has on other visitors - searching for someone they used to know, rubbing their fingers across the name when they find it and wondering what it all means;

seeing people "rubbing" a name onto a piece of paper to create a keepsake they can take away with them;

seeing the flowers, the letters, the poems and other mementos that were left close to the name of a fallen loved one.

An event like visiting The Wall can cause us to reflect on the dreadfulness of war and commit to ensure such horror never happens again. One can only shake one's head and commit to do what one can to ensure such horror never happens again. Here are a few sites that can give one a sense of the Wall from afar.

- sc94.ameslab.gov/tour/vetmem.html is a site that shows the wall, gives a brief history

of how the wall came to be and provides directions to it.

- www.geocities.com/pentagon/quarters/4800/thewall.htm is a site where one can search a Vietnam Memorial Database for individuals who died in that conflict - by name, by city etc.
- www.virtualwall.org is a site that allows one to search for a veteran's name and then to leave a personal remembrances about them or to view remembrances previously left. The emotion in these remembrances is both raw and wonderful.
- The [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall Page](#) is dedicated to honoring those who died in the Vietnam War. Since it first went on line in 1996 it has evolved into something more. It is now also a place of healing for those affected by one of the most divisive wars in our nation's history. It has hundreds of links to Vietnam-related educational, events, memorial and POW/MIA web sites.

The Holocaust Museum - My first thought after having visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC was that those who were exterminated during World War II would be very proud of the museum. The creators of the Museum did an incredible job of conveying the history, happenings and horrors of The Holocaust. The museum's news articles, film clips, voices of the survivors, and physical remnants from extermination camps helped to illustrate the horror of it.

If you go to DC and do nothing else, go to the Holocaust Museum. Hopefully you won't come out the same. And please, if you have children, take them to this museum if they are old enough so that they can begin to understand what happened and to think about it as they grow up. As horrific as it was/is, it happened and more important than scaring a child is to prevent anything even close to this from ever happening again.

[Click here](#) to go to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.



More Examples



Readers' Stories

Additional Actions That Support Our Heritage

BACK

Actions That Keep Us Involved In the Democratic Process

One of the unique characteristics and basic tenants of a democracy is that its citizens get to vote - both figuratively and literally - and that each citizen is able to live the life of their choosing - to be able to say and do what they want - within the law.

We are a democracy. A democracy is a form of government that is "of, by and for" the people. *Of the People* means the government is comprised of *regular* citizens; *by the people* means the government is elected by its citizens; and *for the people* means that the sole purpose of the government is for the benefit of all its citizens.

The democratic process is the way we make that happen. We make the "of the people" part happen by running for public office; we make the "by the people" part happen by doing the things needed to elect *our best* to public office; and we make the "for the people" part happen by doing those things that keep us educated on important issues, that keep elected officials aware of our points of view, and which enforce our laws. The democratic process is not a methodology, but a lifelong way of thinking and acting.

When we invest time, energy and money in something, we tend to care more about that something. So actions that keep us involved in the democratic process help us care about and appreciate our democracy and freedoms. They are the actions most closely associated with citizenship.

Citizen Actions

1. [Ask a friend how they feel about a specific issue.](#)
2. [Email the address of this website to a friend.](#)
3. [Encourage others to vote.](#)
4. [Express your opinion to an elected official, to a radio station, to a publication or to a company.](#)
5. [Pay the taxes you owe.](#)
6. [Place a link to \[www.goodcitizen.org\]\(http://www.goodcitizen.org\) on your personal website.](#)
7. [Protest over something you feel strongly about.](#)
8. [Pursue injustices, even at personal inconvenience.](#)

9. [Serve on a jury, if asked.](#)
10. [Sign an initiative or petition you agree with.](#)
11. [Talk about current events at dinner with your family.](#)
12. [Tell someone when you don't approve of their actions.](#)
13. [Vote.](#)
14. [Watch or listen to a debate between candidates for elected office.](#)
15. [Work at a polling location.](#)



**Reader Submitted
Actions**

Ask a Friend How They Feel About an Issue



In some ways this action is so easy and so useful and can be so intellectually invigorating. It's so valuable because listening to someone else's thoughts is so educational. Educational in that it gives us another person's perspective on the issue; educational in that it gives us a better sense of our friend; and educational in that it gives us an opportunity, and presents a challenge, to more clearly formulate and articulate our feelings on a specific issue.



Yet in another way, this action is hard so for most of us! It's hard because discussing an issue becomes a possible source of disagreement and thus a possible barrier to a friendly relationship. Most of us want to be liked and, unfortunately, many of us believe that discussing issues may lead to disagreements and that if we disagree, we won't be liked by the person we disagree with.

If a person doesn't like you because of what you think then perhaps that person isn't worth being a friend with. Discussing issues can be the foundation for a great and intellectually stimulating friendship.



Readers' Stories

Email the Address of This Website to a Friend



If the basic beliefs of citizenship set forth of this web book resonate with you, then you'll appreciate the importance of this action. Citizenship is, almost by definition, a grass roots activity.


Email the address of this site - www.goodcitizen.org - to your friends to encourage them to do the small things, that when done by all of us as the opportunities arise, keep the country strong and thus free.

Thanks.

Encourage Others to Vote



Voting is so important and for so many reasons. And not only do we have the privilege of voting, but we can encourage others to vote by:

- Voting yourself, which is a form of encouragement. It tells others that voting is important and that it's not too difficult.
- Display the "I Voted" sticker or button often given at polling locations as a reminder to others that it is an election day. 
- Offering to take someone to their polling location.
- Taking your children with you when you vote - they can come into the booth with you and begin to understand how one votes.
- Explaining to someone how to register to vote, how to find their polling location or how easy it is to vote absentee.

And as the following snippet suggests, simply reminding others to vote has been shown to significantly increase the chances that they will vote.

"The Yale University political scientists who let this study sent students out to deliver nonpartisan get-out-the-vote messages to randomly chosen houses. After the election, voting records revealed that the turnout was six percent higher among the households contacted. (That's not exactly peanuts, given the lackluster voter turnouts in the United States recently.)" - *October 2000 Reader's Digest*

Sometimes knowing that someone else cares is all it takes.





There are many things we take for granted, and the ability to freely say what we believe is one of them. Amazingly, in many countries, when one speaks out against the government, there is the prospect of recrimination, jail or even bodily harm.

When you hear or read something that has national implications and with which you agree or disagree, writing a note to the appropriate organization or person does a couple of things:

- 1) It lets the organization know that people are hearing their message and how they're reacting to it and
- 2) it allows Americans to express their viewpoints in ways other than voting.



Elected Officials

Expressing our opinions is the only way others know what you think. It helps you formulate your own beliefs, and encourages others to form theirs also. You'd be surprised and pleased at the impact a letter to a public official can have. Here are some links for sending your senator, house representative or the President a note.

- The official [White House](#) web site.
- The official [U.S. House of Representatives](#) web site.
- The official [U.S. Senate](#) web site.
- [www.congress.org](#) This site allows you to find and communicate with members of congress; the president and vice-president and white house staff; the Supreme Court and state governors; and to track legislation.
- [www.e-thepeople.com](#) A creative, interesting and useful site. Allows on-line letters to be sent to over 170,000 government officials in over 9,800 towns. It also allows one to start a petition or to sign one already established and/or join in discussion groups about major topics being discussed nationally.

Radio Talk Shows

Another great venue for expressing your opinion is on a radio talk show. It's not as hard as it might seem to get through.

Letter to Editor

Writing a letter to the editor is also an effective way to express your opinion. Because letters to the editor need to be brief, writing such letters often forces us to find the essence of our thinking

There are so many issues that need creative, well-thought out solutions. The country needs to hear what you think. Our country is based upon an educated citizenry.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



Until we go to a flat tax system or a use-based tax system, this action should probably have said "Pay the taxes you think you owe." The current tax code makes it difficult for many Americans to accurately determine what they owe. But the reality is, the federal government does provide needed services, and those services are funded by the taxes we pay.

Explain to your children why we pay taxes and what services our taxes provide.



Sites & Resources



If the basic beliefs of citizenship set forth of this web book resonate with you, then perhaps you'll consider placing a link to www.goodcitizen.org on your personal web site or asking that it be placed on your company's web site.

The book's cracked flag-heart logo is included here. To include it, and a link to www.goodcitizen.org in another site, just copy the following HTML and paste it into another site.



```
<a href="http://www.goodcitizen.org" target="_blank"></a>
```

Thanks.

Protest Over Something You Feel Strongly About



To protest is to express objection to an idea, a cause, a position or an action. The ability to express one's opinion freely and peacefully is one of this country's great strengths. It allows all points of view to be heard and thus considered. I have always thought that holding up a sign in public in protest over something you feel strongly about takes a lot of courage and commitment.

There are many ways to protest, some more visible than others - from privately boycotting a product or service, to sending a letter of protest to an organization, to publicly protesting, to circulating or signing a petition of change.



Protest over
something you feel
strongly about



Readers' Stories



It's so easy not to do

anything when we are the target of an injustice or see someone

The Giraffe Project is a great organization that recognizes individuals who "stick their neck out".

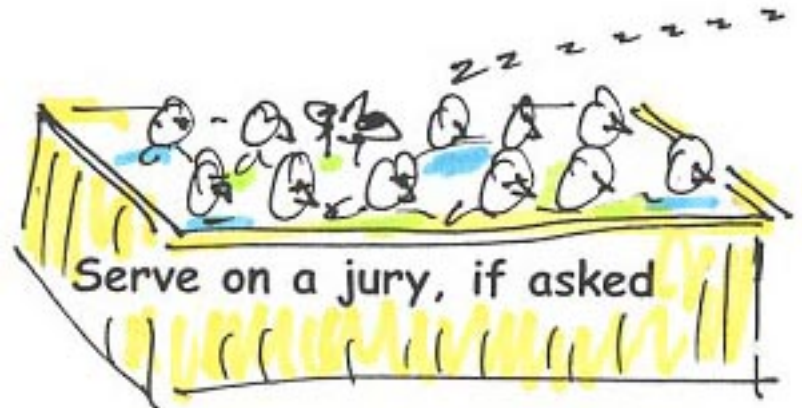


Readers' Stories

Serve on a Jury, If Asked



Laws are important. They prescribe how a society will function. Without them, a society like ours wouldn't survive. In this country, it is the judicial system that determines whether individuals or organizations have broken the law. The most common way the judicial system makes this determination is to have a jury of other Americans listen to the evidence and determine the guilt or innocence of the accused.



If individuals who break the law were to be found innocent, and individuals who have not broken the law were to be found guilty, then our laws would become meaningless. Thus the ability of juries to properly determine guilt or innocence is critical to our survival.

Serving on a jury is one of the most important, and in many cases, interesting ways in which an American gets to serve her or his country. Avoiding jury duty because you are busy at work may seem important in the short-term, but in the long-term, it is not a good reason and hurts the country. Jury service reinforces and makes real the need for laws and the need for juries!

If you are brave, then when someone complains that they have just received a summons for jury duty or brags about how they got out of jury duty, speak up.

One more thought. If you are fortunate to get onto a jury, remember how important it is to make your decision based upon the evidence and the law. Making decisions based upon prejudice or what you think the law should be, destroys the credibility of the system. By the way while juror selection varies by state, jurors are often selected at random using voter registration and Department of Motor Vehicle lists.



Readers' Stories



Sites & Resources



Talking about current events at the dinner table with ones children is not only a great way to spend time with your kids (or parents) but it sets a good example that it's okay and important to talk about events to have ones own opinion.



Readers' Stories

Tell Someone When You Don't Approve of Their Actions



Most of what other people do is not our business. Fortunately in this country, each of us gets to live our own life in our own way and not according to how someone else wants us to live it. However, we are also a society, and because of that, each of us must make certain accommodations to our behavior.



When someone acts in a way that is detrimental to the society, we, as members of the society, have the responsibility to let that person know that their actions weren't in the best interest of the society. Easier said than done, but our actions impact others and eventually our society.

Saying something to someone who does something you don't approve of is one of the toughest "citizen actions" in this book. David Viscott, a psychiatrist and national talk show host, used to say that an effective way to tell someone when they do something that "hurts" you is to form the sentence as follows:

When you (fill in - i.e. "ignore me"), it makes me feel (fill in - i.e. lonely). This directs the feeling to you and not to the individual.

Allow yourself to voice disapproval for actions that undermine our freedom.



Readers' Stories

Vote



Voting is the essence of democracy. Failing to vote is to become a member of what the media calls the "silent majority" and to open the door for the demise of democracy. The reality is that in a democracy the notion of a "silent majority" is an oxymoron. A more accurate term would be the "silent minority". To not vote is to take the "by the people" out of Lincoln's Gettysburg address line "Government of the people, by the people and for the people".

To vote "properly", one needs to be eligible, be registered, know about the candidates and issues, know where to vote, and finally vote.

Voter Eligibility

To be eligible to vote, one must:

- be a citizen of the United States
- be a resident of the state in which they intend to register
- be at least 18 years as of the day of the next election to vote
- NOT be in prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony.
- be registered 29 days prior to the election.

first register. In order to register One can register to vote by:

Voter Registration

To be eligible to vote, one must first register. One can register by:

Whom to Vote For?

To vote effectively, one must understand the issues and compare candidates. In most states, Voter Information Pamphlet's are sent to registered voters prior to an election. These pamphlets usually contain information about the issues and candidates. Also a number of web sites offer election information. Smart Voter is a Web site that offers personalized election information based on a voter's address. Try it out!



**Get your
ballot!**

Street Address:

Zip Code:

[Your address is confidential.](#)
From the League of Women Voters of
California

[Democracy Net](#) is a public interest site for election information. The site is funded by the League of Women Voters. One can simply enter their zip code to find out who's running for offices on their ballot and where the candidates stand on issues you care about.

Where to Vote

To cast ones vote, one needs to know where to vote. Voter information pamphlets usually contain the closest polling location.

Actually Voting

Voting first thing in the morning or scheduling the time to vote are two ways to increase the likelihood that one votes. Visiting the location prior to election day also increases the likelihood of voting.

Absentee Voting

Usually Voter information pamphlets contain an application for an absentee voter's ballot. It takes only a couple of minutes to complete the application. In California, for instance, the Application For Absent Voter's Ballot only requires one's birth date, phone number and signature in addition to the printed name and address information. I was also pleasantly surprised that the Absentee application could be received as late as one week before the general election. The actual absentee ballot is virtual identical to the ballot at voting locations. The only difference is that one punches out their selection rather than do it via a mechanical device.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



Political debates are perhaps the best way to assess candidates for public office. Such debates present a forum for voters to listen to the candidates' ideas and to observe their style, poise, persuasive ability and reaction to challenges and criticism. And while many of the debates may not be "real" debates, they often provide the opportunity to see for ourselves and not rely solely on candidate spin doctors, or media-driven perceptions.

Unfortunately, there tend to be few debates and the media often doesn't cover them. Front-runners tend to avoid debates for fear of making a mistake. All too often in today's society and political environment, the candidate who is the incumbent, or who is most attractive, or who has the money, or whose family has political experience and connections is given front-runner status. We as citizens need to demand more debates.

As citizens, we have gotten away from scrutinizing candidates and voting for those whose ideas match our beliefs of what is good for the country. The [League of Women Voters](#) does a good job of promoting and sponsoring political debates. Educate yourself on the issues by seeking out more information on candidates and demanding better media coverage of debates.



Other than perhaps working as part of a candidate's election campaign, there isn't anything like working in a polling location during an election. It gives one a unique feeling of participation and a unique understanding of a democracy - of the importance and power of voting. Ensuring the privacy of voting and ensuring that fraud isn't committed are powerful responsibilities.

While elections are handled differently in various states, it is often the County Registrar of Voters that is responsible for conducting elections. In most states, they need individuals to "man" the multitude of polling locations. A small fee is often paid.



Readers' Stories

Additional Reader-submitted "Democratic Process" Actions

[BACK](#)

Actions That Support Groups With A Responsibility For Keeping The Country Strong

There are certain groups whose jobs were specifically created to keep the country strong. Strong in the sense of safe; Strong in the sense of fair, useful and enforced laws; Strong in the sense of educated citizens; and Strong in the sense of talented leaders with the best interest of the country at heart. These groups include:

- Elected officials
- Firemen
- Judicial officials and juries
- Law enforcement individuals
- Military personnel and veterans
- K - 12 teachers

By understanding the issues these groups face; by supporting and *challenging* them when appropriate; and by ensuring that these groups attract the most talented individuals and have the resources they need to carry out their functions, we can help them do a better job and make the country a better place to live.

Citizen Actions

1. [Attend a School Board meeting.](#)
2. [Discuss the role of the military with your daughter and/or sons.](#)
3. [Give credit to individuals who act on behalf of the country.](#)
4. [Go on a police "ride-along".](#)
5. [Participate In, or make a donation to, a group with this country as its focus.](#)
6. [Provide feedback to the Police Chief and Oversight Boards on positive and negative encounters with Police officers.](#)
7. [Seek more pay and better conditions for military persons, veterans, teachers and police officers](#)
8. [Send a care package to servicemen overseas.](#)
9. [Volunteer to help out at your child's school.](#)
10. [Wave to a policeman](#)



**Reader Submitted
Actions**



Educated citizens are critical to an effective democracy and thus to being free. Our country's kindergarten through high school (i.e. K - 12) public and private schools are the primary way our citizens are formally educated. Most public schools are part of a school district which is managed by an elected Board of Directors. These school Boards are instrumental in determining the quality of their schools and thus the education of our children and the strength of our democracy.

While K - 12 schools boards differ from state to state, typically they are responsible for things like:

- establishing a budget and the allocation of funds,
- approving the hiring of teachers,
- approving the building of new schools,
- negotiating contracts with teachers' union,
- determining the curricula and books to be used, and
- setting school policy for such things as school hours, discipline, and dress guidelines.

Most school boards are elected. Attending the school board meeting in ones school district is a great way a) to assess the quality of its elected members and provides them an impetus to do a great job, and b) to gain a heightened awareness of school-related issues and provide in-person input on these issues. A good understanding of the school board and the educational issues they are dealing with results in better voting and more accurate information when discussing school-related issues with others.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



The Giraffe Project.



Sites & Resources



More Examples



Readers' Stories

Go on a Police "Ride-Along"



Forget going to an amusement park. Forget watching Real TV. If you want some reality, go on a Police Ride-Along! Many police and sheriff's departments have programs where citizens can ride along with patrol officers. Call your local police department or sheriff's office to find out if they have such a program and if so, how it works.

Many of us live in a "sheltered" world. We live in a socio-economic world where we are generally unaware of the level of crime and violence and poverty and despair.

Riding with a police officer gives one an appreciation of:

- What it's like to be a law enforcement officer.
- The importance of police in maintaining a stable society.
- The importance of police training in order to handle a multitude of situations in ways which not only protect themselves and other citizens from harm but which respect the civil rights of individuals.
- The potential danger police officers are placed in on a day-to-day basis and how courageous they can be.
- How real and dangerous weapons are.
- How devastating it is to have a corrupt police officer or department.



Readers' Stories

Participate in, or Make a Donation to, a Group with This Country as Its Focus



 Red Cross

Provide Feedback to the Police Chief and Oversight Boards on Positive and Negative Encounters with Police Officers.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



In the case of our military, we need to make sure Veterans are treated better than they have been in the past. A [commentary](#) from Rush Limbaugh about the discrepancies between how we are compensating families of the victims of September 11th versus how we pay the families of servicemen killed in action says it all.

In the case of teachers, we need to push for fewer children per classroom. The ability to teach or to learn diminishes exponentially as the number of children in a classroom increases. California has a law that restricts the number of children in K - 3 classrooms to 20 and the results have been encouraging.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



Can you imagine how nice and encouraging it must be for an American soldier living in a new and hostile environment to receive a package of "goodies" from someone they don't know - along with a note of support! You'd be surprised how easy it can be to send a Care Package to a member of our armed forces - just click on Sites and Resources.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories

Volunteer to Help Out at Your Child's School



In general public school classrooms are overcrowded. Managing, much less teaching, 30 to 40 kids in a classroom is a daunting task. Most teachers welcome parents helping out with classroom tasks such as taking attendance, grading papers, making copies, providing individual care to certain students. Volunteering to help out in a classroom also reinforces the importance you place on education with your children and helps give you a better appreciation of what it takes to run a school, manage a classroom and how very important teachers are.



Wave to a Policeman



In a society with many people like the United States, it's important that we respect each other. The Constitution suggests that specially trained Americans like the police, the FBI etc. enforce laws that we created. Normally, when we talk with policemen, it's because we may have done something we shouldn't have. Even though it's unpleasant for us, it's also unpleasant for policemen. Explaining to people what they may have done wrong isn't easy, and they do it all day, every day!



When you wave to a policeman, you are saying, "I understand and appreciate how difficult your job is" and you are thanking them for helping enforce our laws. Just like you would, they do a better job when they feel appreciated, and in addition, the country becomes a safer place to live.

Additional Reader-submitted "Country Strong" Actions

BACK

Actions That Foster A Sense of Community

Strong individuals and families are critical, but not enough. Individuals and families need and rely on others for day-to-day survival, food, shelter. These "others" are the community. Our country is really a community of communities. A sense of community and of belonging is something most of us need and want - but which I believe is missing for many of us.

In today's world where both parents often work, where technology allows us to communicate without leaving the house, where crime has limited our outside activities, where we travel and are a mobile society and where communities are more diverse, a sense of community is not as easy to come by as it used to be. Here are some actions that can help create a better sense of community and let each other know that we are all in this together.

Citizen Actions

1. [Befriend a neighbor who is elderly - invite them to dinner, bring over a dessert, or offer to take them shopping or on an outing.](#)
2. [Donate blood.](#)
3. [Extend small courtesies to individuals of 'difference'.](#)
4. [Get to know your neighbors.](#)
5. [Give away things you don't use.](#)
6. [Keep a trash bag in your car.](#)
7. [Make a friend with someone from another race/ethnicity.](#)
8. [Participate in organ donor program.](#)
9. [Perform a "random act of kindness".](#)
10. [Pick up a piece of trash each day.](#)
11. [Recycle.](#)
12. [Register to be a bone marrow donor.](#)
13. [Start a neighborhood watch program.](#)
14. [Start a tradition in your neighborhood of having an annual "pot luck".](#)

15. [Stop to help a bicyclist or driver in need.](#)
16. [Visit churches, restaurants, stores and parks located in ethnic neighborhoods different than your own to discover the richness of American culture.](#)
17. [Volunteer.](#)
18. [Watch America's Most Wanted.](#)



**Reader Submitted
Actions**

Befriend a Neighbor Who is Elderly - Invite Them to Dinner, Bring Over a Dessert, Offer to Take Them Shopping or On an Outing



Helping each other is what a community is all about. Often as we get older, we can use help or appreciate company. In today's society, it's not as likely as it used to be that families and relatives live near each other.



Readers' Stories

Donate Blood



Every day approximately xxxx Americans need, and receive, xxx,xxx pints of blood - and the need is growing because of medical advances and an aging population. For example, a liver transplant, increasingly routine as more and more hepatitis C victims become sick with liver cancer, can use up to 100 pints per day. Those inflicted with Sickle Cell Anemia require a transfusion every three to four weeks.

Donating a pint of blood can save up to three lives. "When you give blood, it's separated into three components.

1. Red blood cells are taken out, for people with anemia or low blood count due to blood loss.
2. Platelets are transfused to those with low platelet count, such as leukemia patients.
3. Plasma is given to people with various clotting problems - those who've had transfusions, for example.

Most of the nation's blood supply comes from blood donated from other Americans. About 48% of eligible Americans have never given blood. Periodically donating a pint of our own blood is a small gift most of us can easily give to ensure an adequate supply. There are few things that are so easy to do and yet which can have such a profound impact. Blood, of course, is literally the "life blood" for those in need.

In order to give blood, you must be at least 17 years and weigh at least 110 pounds. You can give blood every 2 months. The actual drawing of blood takes about 10 minutes. You can give blood at:

- 1) for-profit blood banks,
- 2) [American Red Cross](#) blood bank centers,
- 3) many medical facilities and
- 4) [America's Blood Centers](#) (ABC) is the national network of non-profit, independent community blood centers that collect almost half (47%) of the U.S. blood supply. Together ABC members serve over 125 million people in 46 states at more than 450 blood donation sites. They also provide more diagnostic and therapeutic services than any other U.S. blood organization.

Consider giving blood with your child when they reach the age of 17 - it may help start a lifelong habit of donating. Also giving blood on your birthday can make it even more special.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



We live in a country with more diversity, of every kind, than any other nation on earth. It's one of our greatest strengths. It's also one of our greatest challenges. Diversity implies differences and differences often create uncertainty. Additionally, many culturally diverse groups have a history of conflict with one another - a history of fact, a history of perception and a history of innuendo. So I think it particularly important that when each of us encounters someone different from ourselves (i.e. an "individual of difference"), that we go out of our way to show that individual that they are on equal footing with us, that we respect them, etc.



Yes, we should do this to everyone, but when two individuals of similarity interact, there usually isn't that potential tension of difference. However, when we encounter someone of difference on a day-to-day basis, we go out of our way to:

- hold the door for them,
- look at them and say hello,
- give them the right of way,




More Examples



Readers' Stories



As we become a more global and mobile nation, we are also becoming a more transient nation. The classic notion of community with  ...is changing. Not long ago when one moved into a neighborhood, they were formally welcomed by an organization called the Welcome Wagon. The Welcome Wagon wouldIn that era, we knew our neighbors. In today's fast-paced world, we often don't know our neighbors. It helps develop a sense of community.

We are part of a society. Meeting you neighbors helps reinforce this and helps us realize of the importance. It is a step in becoming part of society. We need to be there for each other. Share phone numbers.



Readers' Stories

Give Away Things You Don't Use



Many of us have a lot of things we rarely, if ever, use. Months and years go by and these things sit in our closets and garages, not used.

Clothes, furniture, sporting good, kitchenware and utensils, pictures, etc.

Giving away things you don't use has a lot of advantages:

- it can simplify your life and free up space
- it reduces the number of natural resources we, as a nation, must use to sustain our life style,
- removing clutter can free your energy and allow you to focus on your life's work,
- it helps other people by allowing them to acquire things they couldn't afford otherwise and



You may be able to deduct a part of the value of these items on ones tax return.



Sites & Resources



More Examples



Readers' Stories

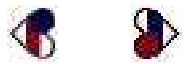
Keep a Trash Bag in Your Car




Throwing or dumping ones trash (e.g. paper, food, etc.) on the ground or into the water says to others that you don't care about them. It's not only an eyesore, but trash can be unsanitary and potentially harm wildlife.

Keep some plastic shopping bags in your glove compartment for those times when you need a trash bag. They are easy to store, are somewhat moisture proof and have handles.

Make a Friend with Someone from Another Race/Ethnicity



While we are basically all the same - human beings made up of certain chemical elements, we are all different like individual snowflakes. Unfortunately 

As parents, one way to send kids to a multi-cultural camp.

Knowing someone of from a different culture lets us decide for ourselves about each individual and helps adjust our perceptions and generalizations.

Need to go out of our way to do this something, since we often tend to group in ghettos.



Readers' Stories

Participate in Organ Donor Program



The organ donor program is a national program for donating all or part of ones body upon ones death. Donated organs and tissue are given either to other individuals or to research. If you sign up (see below) and then die, then your family is first asked to sign a consent form. Then your body is can still be cremated or buried.

Each day about 57 individuals receive an organ transplant - the good news. Each day about 13 other individuals die because not enough organs are available - the bad news. Needless to say, there is a great need for various organs by individuals who....and a need for organs and other body parts by researchers. Understandably, organ donation is an uncomfortable subject for many of us - probably in part because we don't understand what it means to die and it's hard to imagine.

First, anyone can indicate her or his intent to donate. Person's under 18 must have their parent's or guardian's consent. Medical suitability for donation is determined at the time of death.

One typically indicates her or his interest be a donor on their driver's license. Often, a donor card is included as part of a state's drivers license renewal. A small card is filled out and kept with ones drivers license. In California, an "organ donor" sticker is included so the sticker can be put onto the license. Here is what the organ donor material that comes with the California driver's license renewal material.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories

Perform a "random act of kindness"



Good deeds are the best and most pure when the persons you do them for doesn't know who you are.

1. Put a quarter in a parking meter that has expired and not received a ticket!
2. Let someone in front of you when the traffic is heavy.
3. Help someone with her or his luggage in an airport or airplane.
4. Throw you neighbor's morning paper closer to their door.
5. Share your newspaper with someone else on a plane
6. Turn in lost items - hang items dropped on a path where others people can see them.
7. Leave magazines on plane for others to enjoy - remove the address label.
8. Put mis-delivered mail back in your mailbox with a note to the post office indicating the mail was mis-delivered.

And how does one repay an act of kindness? In a June 2001 [Reader's Digest](#) article, Julia Alvarez describes the many acts of kindness she witnessed and received during an emergency landing caused because her flight was hit by lightning and lost one of its engines. And now when she hears an airplane, she is reminded of the flight and wishes she could pay them back. Remembering how her aisle mate reached out to hold her hand and how she then reached to hold the hand of the high school student next to her, she feels struck by lightning all over again as she realizes that "*the point is not to pay back kindness, but to pass it on.*"

The movie Pay It Forward starring



More Examples



Readers' Stories

Pick Up a Piece of Trash Each Day



I can not prove it, but would bet the house that individuals function better and treat others better in a clean environment, not only enhances quality of life but the value of property.

Why should we pick up someone else's trash - keeps our environment clean.

Picking up a piece of trash given other permission to do the same.

Shows other that you are willing to help keep their world/environment clean. It's a small gift to others..



Doing something is an act of leadership. Seeing someone else pick up a piece of trash can motivate others to do the same. It sort of gives them permission.

Gives one feeling of doing something beyond themselves

Clean environment enhances natural beauty of surroundings - no trash to take away

Clean environment sets expectation of higher behavior

If you go for a walk or take a picnic, take a plastic shopping bag. You can actually use the plastic bag to pick up the trash with if you doesn't want to touch the trash.

In some states, the "Highway Department" allows organizations be responsible for keeping portions of a highway clean and for doing that the organizations name gets posted on a sign on the highway. Adopt-A-Highway Litter Control program.

Recycle



For each thing we throw away and for each thing that we have but don't use, more of this country's and this planet's natural resources must be used - more trees cut down, more animals raised and slaughtered, more water resources depleted, more oil and minerals extracted., - and while some of these natural resources do get replenished, it takes a long long time.

When we don't properly recycle things like motor oil we do tremendous damage to our drinking water and probably without knowing it. One gallon of used oil can pollute 1 million gallons of drinking water!

Recycling stuff you throw away means ...have consumed

Participate in city recycling programs

Return bottles/plastic to store (some states have redemption fees)

"" "" to recycle vending machines



Breakdown into raw materials

Recycling stuff you don't use anymore means

The amount of stuff (glass, cans, paper, plastics) we use (sometimes not even used) and throw away is phenomenal and a waste. If you are convinced based on your experience, visit a garbage dump. For me, it's scary and sad to see so much stuff thrown away, buried or burnt.

Prevent waste by splitting entrees at restaurants - many restaurants provide portions

In today's world, we have capacity to recycle and reuse much of the materials we throw away - including water. Through this partnership for the environment,



Sites & Resources



More Examples

Register to Be a Bone Marrow Donor



Here's an opportunity to give of yourself so that someone else might have a better shot at living.

A bone marrow transplant offers people with cancer or certain blood diseases, such as leukemia, a meaningful chance for a cure. A simple blood test administered through a donation center can determine if you're a suitable match. You must be between the ages of 18 and 60 and in good general health.

National Marrow Donor Day is Saturday, February 12, but you can donate at any time. To arrange to be tested, contact the NMDP donor center nearest you at 1-800-MARROW2.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



Readers' Stories



Readers' Stories



Of course you need to use judgment when doing this because of safety concerns, but plenty of opportunities arise to help a driver or bicyclist in need. There are many ways we can help:

- Call someone for them
- Bring them gas
- Help diagnose a problem or make a repair

When a nation gets to the point where its people don't assist others in need, that nation is in trouble - we are close to that point. The following story appeared in USA Today on July 20, 1990.

Girl's roadside ordeal stuns Italy

All of Italy seems horrified by the tragic story of 6-year-old Vanessa Moretti's search for help for her dying father.

The child was riding with her father, Marco Moretti, 33, on the way from their home near Florence to the beach town of Monte Argentario on Saturday to begin a vacation.

Moretti had a heart attack as the car entered a tunnel on the "Sun Highway," a main road to central Italy's beaches. Before collapsing, he pulled over and the girl got out to seek help.

Hundreds of people beginning their own vacations passed as she stumbled along. She ran into a guard rail and fell into roadside branches.

Scratched, crying and bleeding, she walked more than a mile and spent a half-hour on the side of the road before any passing drivers stopped.

The story has outraged many Italians, who fear it shows they have become selfish and indifferent as their economy has prospered.

"We have begun to show the cold, glacial face that even a few years ago we reproached other, richer countries for having" columnist Sabin Acquaviva wrote in Milan's daily *Corriere della Sera*.

"Because we have inculcated in people the philosophy of well-being, we have created egoist, consumers, people who ultimately are alone and unhappy," he wrote.

Marco Moretti was buried Monday in his hometown of Pontassieve, Vaness

was staying with relatives.

And we are supposed to living in such prosperous times.



Readers' Stories

Visit Churches, Restaurants, Stores and Parks Located in Ethnic Neighborhoods Different than Your Own to Discover the Richness of American Culture



Readers' Stories





President Clinton spearheaded creation of AmeriCorps, a program designed "to give young Americans the opportunity to earn money for college tuition by dedicating themselves to two years of service in public school, nursing homes or charitable institutions." On one of AmeriCorps anniversaries, President Clinton challenged young people "to dedicate a year or two of your lives to a cause larger than yourselves. 0



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories

Watch "America's Most Wanted"



Watch "[America's Most Wanted](#)" Saturday evening at 9 p.m. on FOX. The program has had great success in using the medium of TV to locate and apprehend criminals who have eluded law enforcement. Over 600 of the country's most dangerous criminals have been apprehended as a result of the show. Criminals have been known to turn themselves in after seeing their "story" on the program.



SAT. 9 PM FOX TV



Readers' Stories

Actions That Keep Individuals and Families Strong

It is often said, and it is usually true, that the whole is greater than the sum of the individual pieces. In the case of a country, it is equally true that the stronger the families and individuals within that country, the stronger the country. That is what the actions in this section are about - actions that help individuals believe in themselves and actions that help families enable individual growth.

Citizen Actions

1. [Be the best you can be.](#)
2. [Continue family and personal traditions.](#)
3. [Promote Excellence](#)
4. [Encourage your children to do a good deed and write the story of it as their Christmas or Holiday gift to you.](#)
5. [Keep a Gratitude Journal](#)
6. [Keep in touch with aunts, uncles, grandparents and other relatives.](#)
7. [Learn about, and relate to your children, how your family came to be in this country.](#)
8. [Replace Your credit cards with a debit/check card](#)
9. [Resist intimidation.](#)
10. [Take a course on parenting.](#)
11. [Talk with your children about ways to be a good citizen.](#)
12. [Tell the truth.](#)



**Reader Submitted
Actions**



Our country is made up of individuals or "The People". The strength of any group, whether it be a family or a team or a country, is only as good as the strength its members.

[David Viscott](#) was a brilliant, non-conventional psychiatrist, a nationally known radio talk show host and author of 14 books on relationships. His description of the meaning of life is the best I've heard and the one that resonates for me.

"The purpose of life is to find one's gift.
The meaning of life is to give it."

Living a satisfying life and meaningful life can be accomplished by pursuing the "something" that is within us, that "something" we enjoy and are good at . Like a snowflake, each of us is unique and each of us has a purpose here on earth. Search for your gift and give into it. I have always liked the following quote.

"When you do something,
You should burn yourself up completely,
Like a good bonfire,
leaving no trace of yourself."

- shunryu suzuki

There is great pressure in this country to be the person others want us to be. It is not easy to be ourselves and to believe in ourselves - but it is immensely satisfying and, it is enough!



The point here, of course, is not simply to make a list of personal and family tradition, but to continue them. However making a list of them is one way to ensure one continues them.



Traditions are the activities that provide continuity throughout our lives and that link families and generations together.

Making a list of family and personal traditions can be a useful and fun way of ensuring you keep them alive. Traditions tend to be very personal. In addition to providing continuity, they often are calming in that they give us a sense that "everything is still okay". Sometimes they become or represent the signature or trademark of a person or family.

Make a list of *your* family and personal traditions!



More Examples



Readers' Stories



Mediocrity means not being as good as you could be, not thinking for yourself, doing something not because you think you should but because someone else says you should. Because someone says it or because you read it, doesn't make it true, good for you or good for the country.

An old Dr. Pepper commercial gave good advice - "Decide For Yourself". Set a high standard for your own personal excellence, and be the best you can be!

Encourage Your Children to do a Good Deed and Write the Story of It as Their Christmas or Holiday Gift to You



This action was suggested by a friend when we were discussing how materialistic Christmas has become. She suggested that I ask my daughters to do a good deed and write a story of it as their Christmas present to me rather than a more traditional present.

Discuss with them the importance of helping others and treating all differences with respect.



Readers' Stories



A woman recently called the [Dennis Prager](#) radio talk show on his topic of happiness. She told Dennis of something she did every day that contributed to her positive attitude. She said that each morning she wrote down a few things she was thankful for. She called it her "gratitude journal". I later was told that [Oprah](#) had introduced this idea also on one of her shows.

This action helps the country in a couple of ways. First keeping a Gratitude Journal helps keep us in a positive and appreciative frame of mind. A positive frame of mind increases the chances we will spend more time "outside of ourselves" and concerned about the community. An appreciative frame of mind increases the chances that we will recognize all that we have in this country that we would not have if we weren't free and that we will take small actions to help keep it free.

In addition to listing a few things that you have gratitude for, try writing down what it is about each of those things that you are thankful for.



Readers' Stories

Keep in touch with Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents and Other Relatives and Friends



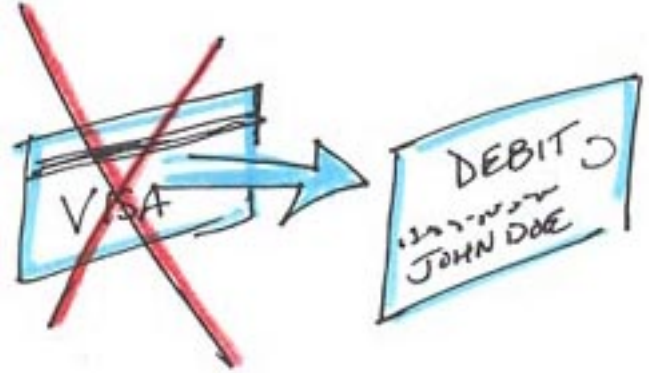
Learn About, and Relate to Your Children, How Your Family Came to be in This Country



Readers' Stories



Being in debt really means living beyond one's means. It's the cause of many of life's struggles and of considerable unhappiness. It often creates a stress that ruins relationships, careers and one's health. Paying off a debt too often results in regrettable decisions - those that try to increase one's means. It consumes a lot of energy and diverts one's attention from one's life. There is something about being in debt that casts a pall over one's life and there is something about having no debt that is freeing, calming and invigorating.



Here are some snippets from a talk that Warren Buffet, one of America's most successful investors and someone who rarely speaks in public, had with some University of Nebraska students:

- "My advice for you is if you can't afford it, don't buy it"
- To begin their careers with modest savings, rather than debts. "Having anything to get ahead of the game instead of behind the game is enormously important."
- The best way to prepare for a financial future "is to get the full use out of your talents. They can't tax what's in your head."
- It's better to enter a low-paying profession they enjoy rather than a lucrative field they might not like.
- "The information revolution argues for a terrific future for the world and especially for this country."

Whereas credit cards charge interest and sometimes have annual fees, debit or check cards have neither and deduct funds directly from one's account. It's easy to always know where one stands.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



If I were to rank the actions, this one would be right at the top.



Readers' Stories





Being a parent and raising another human being to be a good person and to have a positive self-image is a daunting task in the best of circumstances. Many of us are ill-prepared to be parents. None of us had any experience prior to our first child, and few of us have had any training. We often intuitively mimic our parents' parenting characteristics.

The impact on a child of its parents is substantial. The better equipped we are to raise a child, the better the chances that child will grow up with high self esteem and good values. Understanding a few of the basics about infants, early childhood development and what to expect, go a long way toward being a calmer and better parent.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories



Tell the Truth - Always!



Telling the truth doesn't mean randomly expressing ones feelings or thoughts. Nor does mean expressing feelings or thoughts in an insensitive way. But it does mean telling people how you feel and what you think, when appropriate. It does mean being true to oneself (telling oneself the truth) and not to someone else's wishes. Psychiatrist David Viscott said that "the truth may hurt, but it's always hurts less than a lie". There is more than a little truth in the old saying - "the truth shall set you free."

Telling the truth is perhaps the most important thing we can do to live a life that is satisfying and that keeps stress to a minimum.

We live in a society and at a time where telling the truth is not always valued. To the contrary, much around us is not reality-based. Here are some examples of things that distort our sense of reality:

- political correctness inhibits a free expression of ideas and feelings,
- putting spin on events and actions to make them appear what they aren't,
- advertising that often exaggerates if not misleads or is dishonest,
- juries that seemingly ignore the facts and arrive at verdicts more on social issues rather than fact and law,
- the 'canned' laughter in most sitcoms, and
- the fine print meant to mask the "downside" of a product or service.

When one doesn't tell the truth in a relationship, whether personal or professional, it is crazy-making. Crazy-making because we end up acting and responding in ways that aren't based on reality. Such relationships consume enormous amounts of our energy, and since we each have a limited amount of energy, consuming it in inappropriate relationships causes us to waste energy that could be used to live better lives - our own lives.

Telling the truth breeds a strong individual, and a strong individual contributes to a strong family and community, thus keeping our county strong and free.

The Internet has enabled information - both fact and fiction - to be spread quickly so it is more important than ever to ferret out fact from fiction and there are some individuals and sites dedicated to the truth no matter what it is. Click on Related Sites to read about them.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories

Additional Reader-submitted "Individuals Strong" Actions

[BACK](#)

Actions That Help Us Understand the Workings of Our Government

Created in founding documents designed to monitor/keep society strong.



Citizen Actions

1. [Attend a city council meeting.](#)
2. [Attend a criminal trial.](#)
3. [Attend a school board meeting.](#)
4. [Go on a police "Ride-Along".](#)
5. [Read the Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence.](#)
6. [Visit Washington DC, your State capitol or county seat & attend a legislative session.](#)
7. [Volunteer in an election campaign.](#)



**Reader Submitted
Actions**

Attend a City Council Meeting



Unless one lives in an area governed by a homeowners association, the city council or county Board of Supervisors is probably the "lowest" level of government that affects each of us.



Attending one's City Council or County Board of Supervisors meeting is one of the easiest and most relevant ways to see our democratic government in action. Easy in that the meetings are relatively close to where we live and relevant because most of the issues discussed affect us. Such visits afford us a chance to assess the competence of individuals we have elected, to understand the governing process, to understand important local issues and to provide our input directly to our elected officials.

While many towns broadcast their meetings on local cable TV channels, being inside the council chamber gives one a different and more realistic feeling and it takes some of the mystic out of government. Town meetings are usually held a few times a month.

Attend a Criminal Trial



The public is allowed to sit in on almost all jury trials. There simply is nothing like attending a criminal or civil trial to give one a sense and perspective of our legal system - both the good and the not so good. The court building is usually located in County Seat. Unless the trial is for a juvenile, one is allowed to walk in and observe. The court calendar is usually often posted outside the court and indicates if jury trial is scheduled.

Attending helps one understand the:

- importance of juries,
- seriousness of breaking the law,
- Importance of hearing all evidence and of not trying individuals in the media based upon polls, limited and highly "spun" information.
- importance of deciding the outcome based upon the evidence and not on personal or social-related beliefs, and
- roles of the judge, the prosecutor and the defense attorney.

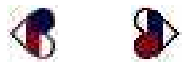


It has given me more respect for the system and allowed me to more clearly understand its weaknesses. It also has demystified some of the glamour associated with some major trials.



Readers' Stories

Attend a School Board Meeting



A district's school board is instrumental in determining the quality of its schools. While school boards differ from state to state, they typically are responsible for things like:

- hiring teachers,
- determining the curricula and books to be used, and
- setting school policy for such things as dress code, school hours, and disciplinary matters.

Most school boards are elected. Attending the school board meeting in one's school district is a great way to assess the quality of its elected members and to understand the types of issues being considered and to provide in-person input or feedback on local school issues. Attending these type meetings also often leads to further involvement.

School Boards typically meet once or twice a month and usually have a time set aside for public input.



Forget going to an amusement park. Forget watching reality TV. If you want some reality, go on a Police Ride Along! Many police and Sheriff's departments have programs where citizens can ride along with patrol officers. Call your local police department or sheriff's office to find out if they have such a program and if so, how it works.

Many of us live in a "sheltered" world. We live in a socio-economic world where we are generally unaware of the level of crime and violence and poverty and despair.



Riding with a police officer gives one an appreciation of:

- what it's like to be a law enforcement officer,
- the importance of police in maintaining a stable society
- the importance of police training in order to handle a multitude of situations in ways which not only protect themselves and other citizens from harm but which respect the civil rights of individuals,
- the potential danger police officers are placed in on a day-to-day basis and how courageous they can be,
- how real and dangerous weapons are, and
- how devastating it is to have a corrupt police officer or department.



Read the Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence



Having a clear understanding of the basic founding documents gives us the proper perspective upon which to take actions and to believe in the actions we take.

Our heritage formally began on July 4, 1776 when the 13 united States of America declared their independence from the State of Great Britain. The [Declaration of Independence](#) describes why we broke away and suggests the kind of society the founding fathers wanted to establish in America.

The [Constitution](#) and the related [Bill of Rights](#) and other [Amendments](#) describe the laws and principles upon which our country was founded.

The [National Archives and Records Administration](#) is a good resource for finding out about and obtaining copies of important national documents.

Visit Washington DC, Your State Capitol or County Seat and Attend a Legislative Session



Washington D.C. is an educational and fun place to visit! As our nation's capitol, it's not only the center of our government and most of its agencies, but it is the home to many organizations that get funded by the federal budget and the location of nation's most recognizable and museums and monuments.

One is allowed to sit in on most Senate and House of Representative sessions as well as many Supreme Court proceedings. It is a great way to see of government in action and to get a sense of the quality of our elected leaders - both the good and the bad.



Sites & Resources



Readers' Stories

Volunteer in an Election Campaign



If you want to feel involved, become a volunteer in a candidate's election campaign. It's easy and they need you. Set sense of election process and effort required to get elected, help clarify some of your own positions, understand issues like finance reform,

Many candidates have web site with contact information for volunteering. You can spend as much or as little time as you have.



Readers' Stories

Reader Submitted Actions

I am lucky to live in a small community and spend a lot of time with the youth on flag ceremonies etc.

One program I have been involved in for 25 years is called "Freedom Academy." MG Watts (my old boss) started this program in Utah. We have recruited a large group of civic leaders, business owners and Entrepreneurs who sponsor the financial end of this event. We invite the new student body presidency of each high school in the state (usually 3 students per school= over 100 schools) to attend a five day camp at the National Guard training site. This is not a recruiting event by any means, but is conducted by volunteers out of uniform.

The curriculum includes a:

- visit to the Supreme Court and Senate at the state capitol building- freedoms and justice;
- half a day at the prison with inmates on death row - loss of freedom and it's price;
- meeting with the local press reps from each station - freedom of the press panel; and
- meeting with a religious representatives of each denomination - freedom of religion.

The list goes on and on. The event culminates with a patriotic essay contest and banquet where the parents return to pick up their enlightened students. The whole program is designed to provide the tools, incentive and materials to have each student body return to their high school in the coming year with a commitment to host a citizenship/patriotic assembly week at their high school and continue to help the students understand our responsibilities as good citizens/Americans, future leaders and voters. I have had many (including our current Governor) tell me it was one of the most memorable experiences they ever had in high school.

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