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Remembering How We Got Here

Sons Of Freedom, Sons Of War

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"Thus may the 4th of July, that glorious and ever memorable day, be celebrated through America, by the sons of freedom, from age to age till time shall be no more. Amen and Amen." ~ Virginia Gazette, July 18th, 1777

"The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants." ~ Thomas Jefferson

Last night, I sat once more among a throng of onlookers, all of us waiting to see the annual Fourth of July fireworks display in State College, Pa. To be honest, I almost didn't go to see them, because this holiday makes me sad. It reminds me of the illusion of "freedom" that exists in this country. It frustrates me because so many people don't even realize what's going on in their own homeland. For what it's worth, July 4th is also the one day people perk up and seem to be paying attention, the one day when we hear words like "liberty" being bandied about by regular folks. Any other day the same people would be too distracted with their own lives to think about "independence", let alone talk about it. So, maybe the fireworks are a needed reminder for us all of what America is supposed to be about, and

how far yet we have to go if we're to preserve our beloved heritage and our ideals.

I wasn't prepared to be dazzled this year. Last year's festivities fell short of inspiring anyone. I remember the quiet anger I felt just a year ago, as I sat among the crowd, wanting to shake each person by the shoulders, to make them understand they are living in a myth, in a non-reality. I remember tears rolling down my face under an exploding sky, and how disconnected I felt from the people around me, who appeared so clueless and carefree. I expected to feel the same way this year, but that's not what happened.

Instead, last night's fireworks inspired me. We all fell silent as the skies began to light up, and I know every person present was affected by what we saw. It's almost indescribable, looking back on it now. Above us, multi-colored fingers of light streaked in all directions, arcing gracefully in slow motion, then cascading down silently back to earth. It was almost like a visual and audial re-telling of that first night of freedom, a thrilling step back in time to the very beginnings of America -only without words. We didn't just watch the fireworks show last night - we were drawn into and became part of it. I imagined that the furious bursts of red in front of me were being fired from invisible canons somewhere off in the encircling darkness.

Spiraling shimmers of silver and gold twisted and shivered before our eyes, tracing vertical trails above our heads, spilling their magnificent brilliance across the otherwise unlit heavens. At times, the sky was in a state of crackling, sizzling, frenzied chaos - depictions of war painted in light, alternating with dramatic whistling silences as above us, the sky morphed into a luminous, undulating landscape, all aglitter in a portrait of peace. It was a visual rollercoaster ride, and every man, woman and child in the crowd sat mesmerized in the throes of such spectacle. At times, the sky seemed to melt into a twinkling, spectral scene and it was nothing short of a glimpse deep into the heart of the cosmos, with suspended points of color and light in every direction - vivid, white-hot, intense and absolutely mind-

blowing. In my mind, I saw other things, too. Messages written in the sky - things like "Freedom is not free" and "You are living a lie". A single tear slid down my cheek bringing me back to the moment with a slight jolt. It would have been such an outstanding opportunity to spell out those words in the sky, with every eye upturned to read them, for once. I can't help but wonder what the reaction would have been. I thought too, of how easily we sit and celebrate our "independence" while our country is at war with, and furthering the enslavement of humanity. The irony went hand-in-hand with the light show.

And when it was over, I walked away from this magical smoky place, lost in a million thoughts, replaying the majesty and considering the future of America. We are the sons and daughters of freedom, of war, and of those that came before us. Time has passed us this torch, and only time will tell what is to become of us. Will we preserve what Thomas Jefferson called "the spirit of resistance" to tyranny? Will we do it? Do we think of the 4th of July and remember how we got here? Does it mean anything to us anymore? And, what revelations will it take for the people of this nation to see beyond the glitz and the illusions? It's hard to say. All I know is, for about an hour last night, I felt an unseen presence among us, a thread of connectivity. And in that fraction of space and time, the past merged with the present and I saw it all through a wide lens. In retrospect, it was indeed a fanfare for the common man.

~ Wars are not fought to decide who is right - only who is left. ~

(Panics) "are the touchstones of sincerity and hypocrisy, and bring things and men to light, which might otherwise have lain forever undiscovered. In fact, they have the same effect on secret traitors, which an imaginary apparition would have upon a private murderer. They sift out the hidden thoughts of man, and hold them up in public to the world."

~~~ Thomas Paine: ~~~

Jim

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