

# July 4th

*July 2015*

We have just observed Independence Day, which marks one of America's greatest holidays. Many of us celebrated July 4th with a day off from work to enjoy barbeques, parades, and family gatherings before wrapping up the day with exciting displays of fireworks.

Although July 4th is a fun holiday, we must never allow ourselves or our children to lose sight of the real reason for celebration. It is not just a day when we dress up in our nation's colors of red, white and blue to fly the flag and shoot fireworks. The Fourth of July marks what may be the most important day in American history. The holiday memorializes the date in 1776 when the Continental Congress and thirteen original colonies of North America declared their independence from Great Britain by adopting the Declaration of Independence. This process accelerated our country's journey toward becoming the great United States of America we live in today. I wonder if the 56 signers of the Declaration had any idea that the republic formed that day would grow into the great nation we enjoy 239 years later!

My family recently visited our nation's capitol. Walking among the many monuments and touring the museums reminded me of the struggles our country's founding fathers endured to establish the freedoms we now enjoy. Signing the Declaration of Independence was near the beginning of our struggle for freedom. The following years were marked by tremendous sacrifice on the part of a courageous group of people. I dare say that the founding fathers could not imagine on that fateful Fourth of July the pain and suffering soldiers would endure during the battles and aftermath of the Revolutionary War.

During the winter of 1777, the Continental Army experienced defeat in battles and persevered through severe weather conditions of hail, snow, wind, and rain. All of this happened at a time when most of the soldiers did not have the food, clothing, shoes, or supplies they needed for the winter. Thousands died from exposure to the elements and the spread of diseases such as typhoid and dysentery. Living in unsanitary conditions, many young men lost arms and legs due to infection and a lack of proper medical care. Soldiers rarely received pay on time under the financial strain of the war. If they were paid, they received Continental Dollars that soon became worthless due to inflation. The conflict lasted for several years from the time Massachusetts was declared to be in rebellion in February 1775 to the approval of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War in September 1783.

If we were to ask most American adults today whether they are patriotic, most, if not all, would respond with an emphatic "Yes!" Although the majority would say that they are patriotic, some indicators show that patriotism is on the decline, especially with younger people. Citizens, parents, grandparents, and especially educators bear the important responsibility of teaching current and future generations about the real significance of this national holiday and the importance of patriotism and love for our country.

Children learn best when they are shown and not simply told. We must model a respect and compassion for others for our children. This includes respect and honor for our nation and the sacrifices by those men and women in our military who have fought to keep our country safe and its citizens free. We must show our children that every person has value, no matter where they live, what their income, or color of their skin. Everyone has the right to enjoy the many freedoms we have here in America.

We must take pride in the fact that we are Americans and that we live in the greatest country in the world. I cannot imagine having been born anywhere else, and I am thankful that I live in the "land of the free and the home of the brave!"