

America the Beautiful

“It has indoor shower. You don’t use outside one!” Thus spoke the landlord renting a few of us a week’s stay in an Olongapo apartment. Several C-130s were providing refueling support for tactical combat practice (war games) and we were to be stationed in the Philippines for a couple of weeks. When afforded the chance, I always wanted to stay where the common local person would live. I called it tourism from below—sort of a grass-roots look at a place.

“Great! There’s never enough time to get ready to hit the town! ...Wait—Where’s the shower?” It turns out the “shower” was a spigot that protruded, waist high, from the wall in a tiny room with a drain in the floor. If you guessed cold water, you’d be right. Then again, none of the little dwellings—not even the outside shower shared by the residents of the apartments—had hot water.

Throughout my travels in the military, and with my grass-roots tourism, I’ve seen a lot of places. I’ve got to admit, there have been a few times I have been thankful for short stays. My attitude has been that “home” is a state of mind, and my home has always been where I am at the time.

But, one thing I’ve learned is that there is no place like the United States of America—indeed there’s no place like home. From what I’ve seen, I figure there is a good reason so many people want to come here. America is truly a land of promise. I haven’t heard of multitudes of people walking thousands of miles to get into China or Russia. Sure, we can close our borders, but I don’t care how many people get turned away disappointed, the image of America as *the* land of opportunity will never fade away. Maybe that’s a good thing....

In America there is still opportunity—for anyone. Like many people, Martha and I both worked full time to get me through the University of Texas at Arlington. I reached my dream of being an engineer, and when my dreams weren’t big enough, I went further. I’m not alone. Many of you have a similar story. There is a not-too-recent movie starring Will Smith—*The Pursuit of Happiness*.... Smith portrayed a real-life man who went from living on the streets to being a millionaire. Perhaps I am naïve, but I believe this is still a land where everyone can rise to their potential if they have a dream and the spirit—the will—to make it happen. Perhaps we are still a land of dreamers....

As I prepared to write this article, I was meditating and asked God, “Is there hope for America?” The answer came clearly, “*There is always hope.*” Our hope is in the fact that life is stronger than death; that love is more powerful than hate. This triumph of life and love is the message of the cross of Christ. We won’t find this hope by looking in the newspaper, watching the news, or soaking up the drivel that the internet bombards us with. Our hope in Life and Love is to be found in God alone.

What makes America beautiful? Her people make her beautiful. God gives beauty to her people. Yes, there are a lot of angry and hateful people making more noise than their numbers justify. But I believe that those people will self-destruct before they can destroy America. If you think back, you’ll remember that we’ve weathered worse....

What makes America Beautiful? Not scenery, but the awe—the knowledge of God—it inspires in her people. Not power, but the prosperity we share, and the safety we provide and enjoy. Not riches, but the dreams of her people. These make America beautiful in God’s sight.

Your land will be called Beulah for the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be married. ...as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:4-5)

This is our 245th year since our Declaration of Independence. May freedom forever shine its light on us.