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Freedom
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Freedom*

*it's not just another word for nothing left to lose. (apologies to Kris Kristofferson)

Americans cherish our freedoms, we have always reveled in the opportunities our country guarantees it's citizens. We have designed our government around the following words written in the Declaration of Independence; "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Beautiful and poetic words, even more so considering the uncertain times in which they were written, by men striving and hoping for freedoms they had yet to experience and could only imagine. But after a life lived under an unfair system of government these men decided to define this new country by the highest of principles, making sure these words would stand the test of time, and remain a guideline for future generations.

As a child I remember wondering out loud, (while I had to memorize this passage for class), why "the pursuit of Happiness" was included in the above sentence, because it seemed less important than the lofty ideals of Life and Liberty. At the time I was told these words were included in the Declaration because the authors understood that Americans could not, and should not, live without Happiness. They wanted to insure that future generations understood the "pursuit of Happiness" is vital to our very existence.

These words in the Declaration of Independence have served as a beacon for many years, but the true meaning of the words has become distorted over time, shaped to the whims and wants of others. The definition of "pursuit of Happiness" has become rewritten by the courts, and redefined by groups who try to limit the manner in which we seek enjoyment in this country. All those that enjoy and/or depend on motorized access have felt the sting of limitations placed on our sport, the inability to access areas previously open, the constant vigilance required to keep these opportunities viable, and the 'pursuit of Happiness' available to all Americans. Traditional sports such as hunting and hounding have become vilified, while rural communities suffer from limitations placed on recreation, tourism and industry.

Concepts that have no real definition or purpose, such as 'quiet recreation' are suddenly getting recognition in the courts, and are being interpreted as preferable, at the very real

expense of thousands of Americans who enjoy other forms of recreation.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident...”, should be words of freedom, not words of limitation. These words hold a power we have yet to use to it's fullest, but have no choice but to employ in our efforts to return to our 'roots'. By looking back, we gain the power to move forward, and remind our fellow Americans of the strength in these concepts, and those guarantees granted us as citizens of this country.

We will have to return these concepts to the forefront of our political scene, understanding that none of us have the power alone to turn back the hands of time, and recognizing that our differing viewpoints are actually a strength. As Americans who cherish our history, we can take lessons from our forefathers to move forward as one, secure in the knowledge that we are fulfilling the very goals set before us by the founders of our country to insure the equal “pursuit of Happiness” to all Americans.

Too often we have been hampered in our efforts by not seeking the advice and knowledge of others, or forging ahead without a shared vision. Working together towards a common goal is often not easy, and can be fraught with uncertainty and misunderstanding. Sometimes we create exclusivity among our ranks, pushing away others who may not outwardly appear the same, not recognizing we all strive for the same 'pursuit of Happiness'. There may be many roads to success; some individuals or groups choose different avenues, all the while still working towards our common goals. But in the end, remaining true to our ideals, we will meet as equals to celebrate in each other's success.

“...With certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”. These are precious words, words to honor, and words that we fight to protect. They represent our history as Americans, and our future as we continue to fight for our right to pursue our 'Happiness'. When one right is taken away, all our rights are threatened. At the present time, we may feel like a small segment of the population trying to defend the right to enjoy our forests and our deserts, but we can join together, with others of like mind, reminding our politicians of our shared history, turning our country back to the ideals on which we were founded. We have proven again and again throughout our history that our American values, those freedoms we cherish, are worth fighting to keep. Our current battle is no different, it continues in our proud American tradition, fighting for Freedom, fighting for our right to recreate as we choose.