



This 4th of July, let's be thankful for another American freedom --To dream!

by Gus Mercado

Today of all days, we know we are free. We see American flags flying — those we've hoisted onto our own front porches, or those that real-estate agents have stuck into our yards.

We hear patriotic music every time we turn on the radio. During neighborhood parades and picnics at the park, we sweat through our red, white and blue T-shirts and feel pretty darned lucky.

Years ago at a flea market, we bought four antique Norman Rockwell plates, each representing one of the Four Freedoms that President Franklin Roosevelt had spoken of: Freedom from Want. Freedom from Fear. Freedom of Worship. Freedom of Speech. I look at them, especially the one of the man watching his children as they sleep, and still get goosebumps.

But as important as all those obvious freedoms are, this country has some we might not think about — or not often enough.

We have freedom to believe, and not just the kind of beliefs that fall under freedom of worship. Freedom to believe for a child means putting a little white tooth under your pillow and knowing without a doubt that, in the morning, a dollar will be in its place.

It means believing with all your heart that surgery will heal your grandmother's back pain forever, that someone you love will get a longed-for job, that you really will save enough money to take that trip to Europe, a cruise through the Caribbean, or to go "Balikbayan" yet again for Christmas or Holy Week.

Sometimes, we may get so caught up in the basics of life that we forget our freedom to dream.

Mainstream Americans should think of the immigrants who have left behind the place they were born, the familiar beds and familiar voices, who brought with them only empty pockets, optimistic hearts — and dreams they never dared voice until now.

As long-time but still excited immigrants to this country, our lifetime dream is to someday drop everything we're doing and to cross the country in our mini-van, visiting every state, every majestic mountain and every fruited plain, travel from sea to shining sea in this blessed country. We know exactly what we want to see and every so often we'll incorporate something new in our itinerary.

"Hey, Dad," my youngest said some years ago when he graduated from college: "You've been talking about this trip since I was 5, when are we really going to do it?" "It's our dream, I tell him. I believe that one day it will come true, but until then we can just have fun planning it."

We Filipino-Americans have equal freedom in this country to choose: Coke or Pepsi. Bowling or a movie. Your house or ours. TFC or GMA. Netflix or DVD. Apple I-phone or Samsung. Mustard or ketchup. Paper or plastic. Sedan or SUV. Chocolate or Vanilla. Manila or Europe.

Every day, every moment in this country celebrates an essence of freedom. We have the freedom to put flowers on a loved one's grave, to freely sing off-key into a Karaoke machine, to spend the weekend wherever and however we want. To mow the yard, play golf, have a drink with the boys, watch an old movie, or just cozy up and hold hands with your loved ones at home.

We can apply for whatever job we want. We're free to run for officer of our local organization, or just be a follower. We can freely speak for Donald Trump, or against him. Support Immigration, or oppose it. We can write letters to the editor. We can post strong opinions on Facebook. We have the freedom to disagree, or be disagreeable. We can say no. Freedom.

Freedom to dream. It lets us dream of a peaceful, prosperous and corruption-free Philippines in which to spend the twilight of our lives. It lets us dream of a world that is free from trouble and strife, no hunger, no wars.

Freedom lets us laugh at something funny during inopportune times (in church during a serious sermon, at grocery-store lines, staff meetings) and to suffer no more than a private embarrassment.

With that freedom to laugh comes freedom to cry — while reading a favorite author's description of something as simple as the smell of jasmine, or the taste of lemonade; hearing a song that reminds you of your first love, or a heart-rending patriotic song like "Bayan Ko" or "Pilipinas Kong Mahal" as we remember our fathers or grandfathers who sacrificed their lives so we could have safe passage into this

country and enjoy these freedoms; hugging your dog for what you know will be the last time. When your grandchild calls you to the window to see the pink of the sky as the sun sets, you have the freedom to cry, or to just give him a big hug.

It also lets you cry when you read about another monstrous natural catastrophe that just claimed innocent lives in our beloved homeland.

Today, as you and I watch the July 4th parade, or clap to the beat of drums, we have the freedom to reach out, to touch the flag and to utter a heartfelt thank-you. Thank you for letting freedom ring in our hearts and in our souls. Thank you to America for embracing us as immigrants when we came to its shores with nothing but dreams. And tonight, if we're out in the country and have stopped at those three-for-one fireworks stands, we have the freedom to hold onto a sparkler and to write our names in the sky, and dream of a better world.

Happy 4th of July! Happy Birthday, America!



About the Author: *Gus Mercado is a multiple award-winning writer, publisher and community leader from Dallas, Texas. In the '90s, he and his wife published Business Horizons, the only Filipino-owned international business magazine in America, with circulation in 92 countries. Gus now owns and manages Datalogix, a high-tech company in Texas and Silicon Valley that has employed hundreds of Filipino engineers in 20 states. Gus is a recipient of the Presidential Banaag Award for outstanding stewardship of Filipinos in America and for exemplary business and community leadership. As National Chair of NaFFAA's Committee on Racial Profiling against Filipinos, he led a successful national crusade to free the "Texas 10", the innocent Filipino airline mechanics who were unjustly arrested and detained in Texas prisons for six months following 9/11. He is currently State Executive Director of PACC Texas, the largest Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce in the U.S. Gus graduated with honors from De La Salle College and worked for San Miguel Corporation in Manila prior to immigrating to the U.S. in August 1972 to escape martial law. He retired from Caltex Global Head Office, Rockwell and Sprint International. He is married to Texas Honorary Consul Ethel Reyes-Mercado with whom he has 4 children and 5 grandchildren.*