



..... **STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH**
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You will have to forgive me. I love this time of year, almost as much as the fall of the year. You can smell the fresh cut wheat in the air. Trucks full of grain are hauling the fruits of harvest to the bin at home or perhaps straight to the elevator. Combines are plying through the fields and even some tractors with balers behind are following, leaving big round straw monuments to the harvest and labor of the farmer. I was a little worried when we declared such an early start to our fair, but knew we were safe a couple of weeks ago when I figured we be going full bore by June 25 and we were and in fact will definitely be done by the Fourth of July. Now if we can just get some much needed rain....it would be near perfect.

Speaking of the 4th of July, I often wonder how many people even recognize the words or have either recited the very document that we celebrate? I know the major parts of it, but decided to at least read the first paragraph, and I challenge others to do likewise. I have to tell you that the Fourth of July has always been one of my favorite holidays, not necessarily because of the activities that go with it, but because of the very meaning of the document that our Founding Fathers risked life and wealth for 240 years ago. I know that patriotic themes will blare from bands and parade PA systems, flags will furl in home and main streets, fireworks will thunder the skies displaying incredible bursts of color and sound, and grills will fill backyards' air with the sweet smell of cheeseburgers and hot dogs. It is hard not to get caught up in the proceedings, relax and sit back without thinking of much but what is around you. Unfortunately, what is perhaps lost with many people with the barbeques, parades, family gatherings, ball games, music, fireworks etc. is the true meaning of this day.

The Fourth of July is rightfully known as Independence Day, the day the United States of America declared its independence from the British Empire. Lest we forget, there were twenty-four lawyers and jurists, eleven merchants and, of special interest to me, nine farmers who met to forge the very document that started America's quest for freedom and liberty. All were men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty could be death if they were captured. They each saw the tyranny of government and did something about it.

We all too often take for granted that declaration assuming America's victory in its war for independence was inevitable and the freedoms we enjoy as a result of that victory a certainty. Actually, five years would pass between the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia and the surrender of Lord Cornwallis to George Washington. Those five years were hard ones with many reversals of fortune for the cause of American independence. At several points it seemed the American patriots were fighting a lost cause. Even after Cornwallis surrendered in 1781, parts of America would remain under British occupation until 1783 and harassment continued for several years after that.

It would be a long time indeed before American independence would be fully secured. Since that time America has transformed itself from a small nation constantly menaced by the imperial powers of Europe to a superpower that would repeatedly rescue and defend that continent, and the rest of the world, from the forces of tyranny. That was all still in the future in 1776 - the year we celebrate on the Fourth, and by no means a sure thing. The transformation of America from a collection of rebellious colonies of men from all walks of life to a global champion of freedom that is the envy of the world could have been aborted at any time, especially in the beginning.

It did not happen because of the courage and sacrifice of the men and women of the Founding Generation who risked everything to gain for themselves and succeeding generations the blessings of freedom. They had no guarantee of success in 1776 and in the years that followed it seemed they were doomed to failure but they did not give up, they would have liberty and, if not, they preferred to die. That determination to live free or die is why our forefathers prevailed in its struggle for independence and why this is the land of the free and the home of the brave. Think of "Give me Liberty or Give me Death!"

If you think of it, Independence Day gives us 24 hours to reconnect with those "truths self-evident" that emboldens that document that we celebrate. But it is these same truths that we increasingly take for granted. In the words of Patrick Henry, one of the Founding Fathers: we are "responsible for the greatest trust ever confided to a political society." If we, the beneficiaries of that great sacrifice, are to retain the independence and the freedoms we enjoy today, then we must, first, be eternally vigilant in the protection of our liberties and, second, be as willing as our ancestors to give our all in the defense of government of the people, by the people and for the people. We must not lose sight of the past or future! I think sometimes that we as a Nation have lost its way and that true patriotism and mutual love for this Country has been replaced with idealism, political correctness and lack of common sense and civility. Can you imagine anyone today even trying to do today what those brave farmers, doctors, lawyers and businessmen did 240 years ago! Sadly I doubt it would happen today!

Food, fireworks, music and other fun activities associated with the Fourth of July are wonderful and I sincerely wish everyone an enjoyable time. Yet we must always be mindful that freedom, especially our freedom as Americans, is not a gift, but must be earned and jealously guarded generation after generation. So on this Fourth of July and all others in the future, amidst all the celebrations, I hope we all stop to remember the sacrifices that made this day possible and commit our lives, our efforts and our sacred honor to upholding the legacy of freedom bequeathed us on that first Independence Day. I hope we all remember the true meaning of Independence Day --as we have the freedom to do as we choose!!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer, which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email: dlienemann2@unl.edu or on the web at: <http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/webster>