

First Place  
What Freedom Means to Me After Interviewing a Veteran  
by Jasmine Gregory (Winslow Jr. H.S.)

An exhausted pilot carefully listens to his instructions as he swoops down over Italy in his B-17. His mind fills with thoughts of turkey in the oven, and the welcoming smell of fresh apple pie as he walks into his home in Vermont. He pictures his two children running into his arms, telling him about all the amazing things their mother has cooked up for dinner. He will walk into the kitchen and give her a gentle kiss while wishing her a happy Thanksgiving. Everything seems so clear. Then suddenly, the vision vanishes as panic strikes throughout the plane.

The pilot looks across the horizon and sees the enemy approaching. He pulls out a handkerchief his daughter had given him, wipes his brow, tucks it away in his pocket, and then pushes on. The next few moments seem like a lifetime and a day. A missile glides its way toward the B17 bomber and embeds itself just below the right wing. The next thing the man sees is water rushing across him as the plane plummets into the ocean. The excited missile launcher looks across the ocean to see if he has hit his target, and along the way his eye catches a red stained handkerchief lying across the water, marking his victory.

Somewhere far off over the horizon is a little boy playing jacks with his friend on the sidewalk. He has not a care in the world except for what strategy he wants to use to beat his friend. He picks up his prized bouncy ball and drops it down onto the ground. Over at U.M.O., a college student catches a basketball. He races down the court and takes a glance into the crowd to be sure his girl is watching. She smiles and he jumps for a shot. Far off in another world a young girl jumps on her trampoline, dreaming she is soaring high above the clouds. Her father suddenly scoops her up and spins her around as she giggles in his arms.

Not too far from there another little girl is going in for supper. She walks into the house, an aroma of fresh apple pie wafting toward her and warming her from head to toe. She gives her mother a smile of gratitude, but her mother does not give one in return. Timidly, the girl asks if anything is wrong, only to hear the news that her father has been killed overseas. She pauses, waiting for the moment when it all sinks in. It suddenly hits her as she drops to her knees, silent tears running down her cheeks.

What is freedom? How do we get it and who gets it for us? It is the men and women that sacrifice their lives who get this freedom for us. A boy is able to play jacks and young man can play college basketball, as a little girl daydreams while jumping on a trampoline. These are simple joys that people take for granted every day. Do the youth ever consider that someone thousands of miles away is seeing his or her last glimpse of life? These people are someone's husband, father, sister, son, or daughter. Freedom is not a birth right as we may all think it is. Something that is never given, but earned through the death of others, that is freedom, and that is something we should never take for granted.

Second Place  
What Freedom Means to Me After Interviewing a Veteran  
by Katelyn Reynolds (Winslow Jr. H.S.)

Freedom never comes free. We all forget that it took a lot of fight, bloodshed, and sacrifices of the people before us to put us in the place we are today. Most people think of our freedom as a right. I see it as a privilege, something that you have to earn. Our freedom is an honorable treasure that many of us take for granted. It was given to us by the forgotten people who made great sacrifices to allow us to receive it.

When the Fourth of July rolls around, I think that we all tend to remember the soldiers who fought for our country and the ones who lost their lives to do so. Although they have played, in my opinion, the most critical role in the preservation of our freedom, they are not the only ones we have to remember. We must think of all the young children who lost their daddies and the many infants who had to grow up never knowing theirs. It's necessary that we recall the women who stayed at home and cared for the children, trying to keep the household afloat while having to constantly worry about their men on the opposite side of the world. I know that when you think of women and children fighting wars, it may seem absurd, but they made sacrifices, just as all the soldiers who sacrificed their lives fighting for our country.

While thinking about our freedom, I'm sure the word treasure doesn't usually come to mind, but our freedom is just that: a treasure. I don't think most of us realize that freedom is not something that everyone in the world has. Countries, like North Korea, are run under one man dictating all the rules, and if the people decide not to follow, their price to pay could be the loss of their lives. We, as Americans, also had to earn our freedom, and prevent people from snatching it away quicker than the mind could possibly grasp. Many men and women have died to keep us safe, and I don't think very many people take that into consideration.

Americans shouldn't just celebrate our freedom on the Fourth of July. We need to rejoice and be grateful every day that we have the right to an open mind. Many of us show disrespect towards our freedom and the people who made it possible. Actions that may seem small, like wearing a hat in a room where the flag is present or chitchatting with a buddy during the national anthem, in actuality are huge signs of disrespect for the veterans of our country. Breaking a law is also another form of disrespect. Laws are made to make sure that we're safe and that no one can overstep the boundaries of our own personal rights and freedom.

Whether you are voicing your opinion, attending a religious service, or simply deciding what you are going to eat for lunch, recall the people who have given so much so that you could have that right to choice. Your freedom is something precious that has cost great sacrifice. Remember that the patriots of yesterday and today are the ones who fought, and are still fighting, for your tomorrow.

Third Place  
What Freedom Means to Me After Interviewing a Veteran  
by Katarina Rydlizky (Ellsworth Middle School)

I used to think that freedom meant being able to decide what television show to watch, or what clothes to wear. After my visit to Cole Land Transportation Museum and interviewing a veteran, the meaning of the word freedom has changed for me. Webster defines 'freedom' as "a privileged right, especially as guaranteed by a fundamental law." These were just a bunch of fancy words to me. Then I interviewed a veteran from the Vietnam War. We did this to learn about our history, and to learn about the wars from a primary source. The unexpected lesson for me was that I was about to learn the true meaning of freedom.

I learned that not everybody in the Vietnam War had the same job, or even close to the same job. Wayne Cartier, the veteran I interviewed, repaired airplanes, mostly the ones that brought in food and the bombers. He said that every job was interlocked, like a chain. I liked how he was willing to talk about his experience, even though he probably had a million and one other things to do. Since Cartier was mostly in the workshop fixing planes, he didn't engage in direct combat.

Wayne Cartier was in Vietnam from January 27, 1970 to December 29, 1970. Eleven months, two days. He knew these numbers by heart. He was only seventeen when he went to boot camp, and nineteen when he went to Vietnam. That would be like me going to war seven years from now.

Imagine being away from your friends and family for that long, to help insure freedom in the world. To go willingly to help the world regain peace. Not to know what would happen next, whether or not the next 'rocket' that bombed the base, trying to hit the radio tower would hit the tower, the people at the base, or miss entirely. Cartier said that the rockets became part of daily life. He said that when they heard one, they saw where it hit, and either went to the shelter if it hit nearby, went on with work, or tried to figure out where it hit so they could fix it.

Even though almost all of America would consider these people who risked their lives for us heroes, the veterans think otherwise. "...I don't think of myself as a hero. I was just another person doing their job ...," they would say. Of course, everyone else knows better. In my eyes, this man is a hero, protecting not only my freedom, but thousands of other people's freedom as well.

I felt privileged that such a great person full of history would come talk to a bunch of seventh graders from Ellsworth about their experiences. Now the word freedom means something more to me. It is not a jumble of words, it is not being able to watch what television show you want. Freedom is something much more, like knowing that you have the right to speak out, and be safe and unchallenged when you do. Freedom is the positive feeling you get when you know you can do anything, and being able to speak your mind, like I am doing right now. Never take freedom for granted. Be thankful for what you have. Be proud that you can stand up and say, "I am an American, and I am free."