

Winner - Category B (High School)

"What Freedom Means to Me after Interviewing a Veteran" 2009

Student: Hillary Hoyt, Teacher: Worth, Veteran: Nolan Gibbs

True Freedom

Growing up with a father who had served in the military I thought I understood what freedom entailed. At younger ages it meant that we had a flag by our door almost every day and that it would never touch the ground. Freedom to me had meant that my dad had pictures of him in funny looking suits that my mom said was when he was in the Navy. As I continued to grow I learned more of how freedom lets us be who we are, love who we want, and with certain boundaries do what we wish. I have always valued my freedom but after meeting Nolan Gibbs, an United States Army World War II veteran, I appreciate it so much more.

When asked how Mr. Gibbs got into the service he started when he got out of high school. Right after high school Mr. Gibbs worked on a farm for two years. Many of his friends had joined the service and he decided to join also. This whole aspect of life after high school is as surreal to me as I have less than a month until graduation. I know that is because of the fact that Mr. Gibbs, my father and all the other veterans, that I have the option to choose what to do. I have the freedom because of the sacrifice that these men and women made.

When asked how the military affected Mr. Gibbs life he started out talking about his wife. After returning from boot camp for four days he asked his girlfriend at the time to marry him. As he was telling this in his hands was the picture of his wife that he carried throughout the entire war. Talking of the war he said that "(the war) made me understand what living was all about." Once he returned from the war he immediately married. The fact of his love reminds me of just how grateful I am to be able love who I want to. Thanks to Mr. Gibbs I have the freedom of speech and the ability to live in a free country. His words of what living was all about I hope one day to be even partly able to understand this fact on the same level that he does.

The most amazing thing that Mr. Gibbs shared about his time in the service was how he earned his bronze star medal. In his own words "guess I could dodge a bullet." He left a place a safety to aid two wounded men. One of the men couldn't walk so Mr. Gibbs put him in a foxhole got the other man to safety and got a vehicle to go back and get the soldier he had put in the foxhole. He went beyond the boundaries of what most humans would even think of doing. He is a true example of an American hero. Not only did he save those two men's lives but he also allowed future generations to have their lives full of freedoms.

Going into the interview I thought I knew what freedom was. Through talking with Mr. Nolan Gibbs and him sharing some of his experiences in the war he broadened my view on freedom by an enormous amount. Freedom is more than just a flag or a uniform it is the lives of veterans that fought and died for our freedoms. These veterans let us have the ability to be ourselves, love each other, live your lives to the fullest; all because they served our country to keep our true freedom.

2nd Place - Category B (High School)

"What Freedom Means to Me after Interviewing a Veteran" 2009

Student: Kendra Lyman, Teacher: St. Pierre, Veteran: Chuck Knowlen

What is Freedom?

Every child who has ever grown up in the United States has had the definition of freedom thrust upon them. We learn in schools that freedom is what we are blessed with as Americans. We learn freedom was fought for by our ancestors during the Revolutionary War. For a long time it seemed to me that the idea of fighting for our country's freedom ended there. Schools impressed upon us that "being free" was a goal of the United States that was obtained and will be ours forever. My visit to the Cole Transportation Museum reminded me that our country's freedom represents so much more than what is learned through school. There have been few experiences that I would say have had as a substantial an impact on my life as my interview with the veterans at Cole Transportation Museum did. This experience gave me the opportunity to celebrate, honor, and most importantly, be reminded of the sacrifices made for freedom.

The man I interviewed was truly amazing and a true hero in every sense of the word. I have always had the utmost respect for the men and women who serve our country. They truly demonstrate courage that I am not sure I could. Our soldiers recognize at a level higher than any other citizens that the United States and all its freedoms are special and need to be protected. Veterans have risked their lives to defend and protect freedom's principles. Our military men and women of today do the same.

As the veteran I interviewed shared his military experiences, I found myself engrossed and awed by the incredible stories told. He told stories of battles that seemed to be just that; stories that could not possibly be real. As a seventeen year old, small town girl, it was hard for me to imagine the terrible conditions these men endured. The thing I find the most intriguing about any service person is their willingness to fight for people they do not even know. My visit

to the Cole Museum helped me understand at a much deeper level that I have been quite wrong with some of my thinking. Our service people make such sacrifices for the conditions that freedom offers more than the people they do not know. Sure they are fighting to protect their families, but they are protecting every other family in the nation as well. This selfless fighting is the reason we enjoy the freedom experienced in the United States. If we did not have men and women so willing to put their lives on the line, then we would not maintain the freedom that our ancestors fought so hard for.

Freedom is not just something simply given; it is earned. Our fathers before us risked their lives to grant us freedom. Contrary to the beliefs that many Americans seem to have the veterans of Mr. Cole's museum impressed upon me the idea that freedom is continually being fought for. If the forces we are fighting do not directly seem to affect the United States, it could affect our country's ideals in the long run. The veterans taught me that freedom offers rights that need to be constantly fought for and maintained. The veterans reminded me that freedom is something Americans are blessed with and such an idea should not be taken for granted.

It seems to me that too many Americans today do exactly that. People in this country go out and kill, they conspire against the government, and commit many other crimes that are unimaginable to the men who first fought for our freedom. They exercise the rights given to them in inappropriate ways. The veterans impressed on me and my classmates that this can not continue to happen. If it does then the freedom, rights, and liberties that we are blessed with can be so easily revoked or lost.

I never would have guessed that my visit to the Cole Transportation Museum would totally change my definition of freedom. It did just that. Freedom is no longer just a mere word with a simple definition. Freedom is a state of being. Freedom is a way of life. Freedom is a privilege that is blessed upon us by this country and all those willing to make the greatest sacrifice --LIFE. Freedom is not something that can be given; earning it makes it much greater and more valuable. Great sacrifices were made to grant us freedom and great sacrifices are still being made to maintain that freedom. Freedom is a gift that every American must be thankful for. Today and forever more I will be sincerely thankful and appreciative of my interview and experiences at the Cole Transportation Museum.

3rd Place - Category B (High School)

"What Freedom Means to Me after Interviewing a Veteran" 2009

Student: Laura Howell, Teacher: St. Pierre, Veteran: Ray Perkins

Freedom

Until this day, the idea of how I received my freedom never truly occurred to me. In American History class we learned about the American Revolution, the Civil War and World War I and II, where Americans fought for sovereignty and independence for their country, but I did not relate this directly to my own freedom. Interviewing a veteran opened my eyes to the value of liberty, and how our country gained freedom for all its citizens thanks to ordinary women and men who risked their own lives for the rest of the American people, for generations and generations to come. Hearing the stories of war straight from the mouth of the battle fields was a moving experience. The personal experiences of some Maine veterans who left their fiancés, friends and family behind to aid their country, at an age when they were just barely able to vote, allowed me to understand the impact of their sacrifices more deeply. I realized how precious freedom is, how easily it could be lost and how grateful I am to be an American; where soldiers from the past have fought for the freedom of the future. After interviewing a veteran, I believe freedom is the ability to live in a country where I may think sovereignly, act independently and I thank God for the many men and women whose service to our country has allowed me to be free, for "free".

Raymond Perkins was barely eighteen years old when he signed up for the draft for World War II, barely able to vote and barely able to make life changing decisions for himself. But he chose to enter the military and to fight for his country. Although he was only one person, he wanted to make a difference. He joined the Army in 1940 and trained in Florida, where he slept among the poisonous snakes and scorpions. Perkins recalled having a radio in his camp, listening to President Roosevelt announce the United States was at war with Europe on December 7, 1941. From Florida he was sent to Louisiana where he trained to be a machine gunner and discovered that he did not like driving the military jeeps. His next destination was New Calida to fight the Japanese. On the journey across the ocean he saw only water for three weeks, witnessed a hurricane, and noted that everyone was seasick and no one ate. Perkins had left behind his family, friends and "the little girl on the motorcycle", his recent fiancée. He risked never seeing them again and while stationed in New Calida Perkins received a letter saying his father had passed away.

Perkins thought constantly of his family and friends back home while fighting for his country. He carried the picture of his "little girl on the motorcycle" as a continual reminder and connection to home, America. He earned a medal for the Battle of Water Canal, while living on food rations that consisted of a wax box containing sausage, biscuits, candy and cigarettes. He contracted malaria and was sent home to Maine on medical discharge with a \$124 ticket to Bangor. On December 12 he married his "little girl on the motorcycle", Louise. Raymond Perkins taught me to be thankful for my irreplaceable freedom and to not take it for granted. Freedom is precious, and could be taken away. Though I have learned about American wars in school, and read about them in books, speaking directly to veteran Raymond Perkins showed me how the real sacrifices and experiences of people like him, are the reasons why I enjoy my freedom today.

1st Place - Category A (Middle School)

"What Freedom Means to Me after Interviewing a Veteran" 2009

Student: Code Maroon, Teacher: Voss, Veteran: Chuck Knowlen

A man in a powdered wig sits in a room full of men gathered around him. In his hand is a quill and on the table in front of him is a large piece of parchment. He has a wide, proud smile on his face as he lowers the quill down onto the page and elegantly writes his Signature: John Hancock. Everyone around is full of joy and triumph as they are shaking hands and embracing each other. They are proud to be Americans and proud to be free.

Many years later a young man sits in a room full of men gathered around, just as before. There are no powdered wigs, and the young man has in his hand a pen and a piece of paper in front of him. He doesn't have a smile on his face, but you can tell he is proud. An imposing man in uniform shakes his hand and thanks him for enlisting. He is afraid, afraid of what may come. He thinks about his girlfriend, the baby growing inside of her.

The same young man runs across a beach, firing at the enemy. He takes several shots but keeps shooting until the gun runs out of ammo and he drops it. Falling to his knees, he then tumbles to the ground. He lies on the battlefield and looks down to see the blood beginning to seep through his shirt. He closes his eyes and blocks out the noise of gun shots and explosives. The young soldier thinks about his girlfriend and child once more. His daughter would be almost one now. He takes a deep breath; he knows he will never see her. He is surprised to feel not air, but blood come out of his mouth. Growing cold, he shuts his eyes and slips away.

Years later, that man's grandson sits at a desk working on an important test. His eyes begin to wander. He decides that the test doesn't matter and begins thinking about other things. The thought of his grandfather comes into his mind. He had heard his story many times and thought about the sacrifice his grandfather made to protect his freedom. This man he barely knew, but to whom he felt so close, had given his life when he was only a few years older than he was. He realizes how important the test is for his future, and he thinks about how his future is his country's future. He realizes that the "sacrifice" of his attention and thoughts isn't any kind of sacrifice compared to the sacrifice his grandfather made. He proudly finishes the test.

From the founders of our freedom, to the people who protect it, to the youth that is America's future, freedom is what has made our nation strong for centuries. When I went into the Cole Museum on a field trip with my classmates recently, I listened to what "my" veteran, Chuck Knowlen, had experienced and how long he had been in the war. He went through a lot in the Vietnam War, and I could tell he was happy and proud that the youth of America cared. I looked around the room and saw all the smiles on other veterans' faces. That is what influenced me to realize that we are the future. We are what the veterans fought to protect. Our veterans defended our country, and many of them gave everything to do so. It is because of these true heroes that freedom is still a word said aloud, and a word said proudly by Americans today. The least my generation can do is to try in school and at everything we do. We are our country's future, and what America will become. We will one day be all there is left, and we must continue the dream of justice and liberty. We must be the torch. We must feed the fire and let it spread, the fire of freedom. Our veterans fought to preserve our freedom; now it is up to us to prove we were worth it.

2nd Place - Category A (Middle School)

"What Freedom Means to Me after Interviewing a Veteran" 2009

Student: Nathaniel Lombardi, Teacher: Voss, Veteran: Alton Grant

Corporal Grant sprints through a field of straw and wheat, sweating with the stench of fear after having just called in an artillery strike. Right behind him the mortar fire falls from the sky like black snow. As he dives into cover behind an old ox cart, his sergeant yells at him hysterically to blow up the cave where all the Japanese are exiting right in front of them. The corporal, without hesitation, instantly replies, "Yes, Sir!" and yells out to his partner, "Tommy, get over here; we're blowing the cave!" When Tommy sprays out cover fire with his Browning

automatic rifle, Alton runs to a dead cow in the field and takes cover behind the beast. He shoots out some blind fire from his M1 Garand to keep the enemy from charging in and overpowering the two young Marines. They continue this process until they are both on the two opening ends of the cramped, dank cave. They follow their plan as always and have Tommy empty a whole 20-round clip into the cave. The roar of the bullets being projected out of the rifle and the "tinging" of the empty cartridges hitting the cold, hard rock of the cave is overwhelming for the young corporal. This throws off his timing, making the swinging of the satchel charge like a medieval mace even more deadly than it has to be. As he throws it into the cave, the Japanese stumble in the darkness and shriek uncontrollably. Tommy empties another clip and cuts down all of the Imperial Army soldiers who try to throw back the satchel charge in desperation. With the screams of the dying soldiers and the screeching of those fearing the explosion, Corporal Grant runs for cover behind a fallen palm tree and Tommy dives over it next to Alton just as the explosion renders the two unconscious. During the darkest years of the Vietnam War on a dreary October day a wife of a fallen soldier mourns the death of her husband. He had been burned beyond recognition by a napalm bomb dropped by his own country's Air Force. Only days before he had learned that his wife had just given birth to a baby boy. She has been emotionally broken and crying her heart out after learning about the death of her patriot. She is infuriated because only five of the twenty people who were invited have come to the funeral. They are against the war effort. Instead, they take part in the march to the Pentagon to protest the war. She storms out in the middle of the funeral because she can't understand the stupid selfishness of her so-called friends. The following day she takes a long miserable, lonesome ride to the Baptist church to which she and her husband belonged, to pray to God that one day somehow she and her husband would be reunited again.

In a factory in Cleveland, Ohio, John Holden, is manufacturing M1 Abrams tanks for the soldiers to use to push onto Baghdad and crush the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. John has been working there for 15 years and has never been as disappointed in his life as he is now. Everything has become rushed and hectic, trying to get things ready fast enough to ship out to the troops in need. He gets upset when people talk about supporting the war because he is against it. He lost his father in the Vietnam War and brother to Operation Desert Storm. As he attaches the main cannon onto the tank, he is totally demoralized knowing that he is supporting the war that he hates. But looking back at the main vehicle, seeing the other workers attaching the armor plating, raises his morale knowing that it will save the lives of innocent Americans. When the other workers put on the final coat of paint and the finishing touches, he realizes that this machine, made by his hand, would be used to end lives. As some quick tears escape, his

supervisor comes over. Embarrassed, he wipes his eyes with his greasy hand and smudges his face realizing that he and his colleagues have to make ten more tanks that day. While the war against terror is being fought in Afghanistan, an eighth grade girl is sitting in her fifth period study hall with her two best friends. They are using all the colors in their arsenal of markers to make an eye-catching poster that asks people to bring in supplies like toilette paper, toothpaste, and shampoo and to write personal letters that will be sent to troops on the other side of the world fighting to preserve our freedom. They get tons of things, from candies to warm and comforting letters. One of the letters is from a boy in her class. He writes:

Dear Soldier,

I hope the comic books and candies I sent will help ease the tension over there where you're fighting and will make you feel like a kid again! We just started a school-wide program where we gather supplies to send to brave heroes 'like you. We also visit veterans in nursing homes and hospitals. I've been learning a lot about the war lately, and I'm starting to respect freedom and soldiers like you a lot more now. Thank you so much for all that you do for me and everyone. You have all of our support and admiration for everything you have done and continue to do make this the greatest nation in the world.

Sincerely,

Franky Jones

Freedom is a special privilege to which everyone should contribute. If you are a soldier fighting for freedom or if you're collecting supplies to send to our troops, you are helping to defend freedom or are supporting those who do. Generations before us have given their lives so we can have the liberties we do today, and now it is up to us to prove that we can and will do the same to keep this county free. Veterans like Alton Grant, whom I interviewed at the Cole Museum, are our inspirations to understand the importance of freedom. Like he said, "Freedom has a taste that those who have never defended it will never know." Nevertheless, we must support our troops, honor our veterans, and fight in the wars that other nations inflict upon us and we will prosper as always as the greatest nation in the world.

3rd Place - Category A (Middle School)

"What Freedom Means to Me after Interviewing a Veteran" 2009

Student: Annie Abbott, Teacher: Prest, Veteran: Clair Bemis

A True American Story

Instantly, as I walked into the Cole Land Transportation Museum, I experienced history with people and equipment all around me-and I had a few butterflies in my stomach. I was led into a conference room where Veterans were deep in conversation. One Veteran smiled at me and gestured for me to sit down. I did not know what to expect, but Mr. Clair Bemis, my veteran, exceeded my anticipation. Quickly, he made me feel comfortable as he told his story.

Mr. Clair Bemis enlisted on May 28, 1953, and served twenty years in the Marines. It is funny that he did not like school, yet when he went into the Marine Corps, the first thing the Marines did was send him to school. Mr. Bemis served a tour of duty in Korea and two tours in Vietnam. Today, he is still very proud of his service. As he says, "I'll put my uniform on and walk down the street in a minute."

After basic training in the "Pine Tree Platoon," Mr. Bemis ended up on a troop ship landing at Inchon Harbor in Korea. Here he did not see much action, and he was later stationed in Hawaii.

Next, he re-enlisted. This time he saw much more action in Vietnam than he did in Korea. As a helicopter chief, he can remember being fired upon, and his helicopter being patched up with duct tape. But he also remembers injured infantry soldiers. Clair's heroic actions can be seen in his medals.

Clair's views of Vietnam are very interesting. He says that even if you disagree with a government's actions, methods, and plans to go to war, Americans still have a responsibility toward our military men and their families to support and show them that they are admired, loved, and respected by caring people. Americans respond to America's call to serve in the military and should be remembered with dignity and honor.

Today, Clair and his wife have been married for forty years. He spends many days volunteering at Cole Land Transportation Museum. This program has benefited Veterans like Clair because as Clair says, "We buried some thoughts that we couldn't bring out, but this made us bring them out. Now we can face them better."

But really, I received the greatest benefit from Clair. Clair helped me to understand the importance of freedom and all it means. Veterans have fought in wars, and they have

stood watch over my freedom when America was at peace. They have made America safe and secure.

Yet some Americans seem to feel that freedom is free, and it has no cost. Freedom is very expensive. Veterans have fought and purchased freedom at a very high cost of time, effort, and for many, their own blood. Also, their families have paid a price too.

The Veterans' love of freedom is the source of America's character, its dreams, and its achievements. Now I must accept freedom's responsibility to help it survive. I must enjoy my freedom and be grateful for it. Never will I take it for granted! Also, freedom requires sacrifice to keep it alive, and I must be ready to sacrifice. Freedom will not always be convenient or without loss.

Thank you, Mr. Clair Bemis. Veterans are common Americans with uncommon devotion to freedom. Hopefully, America will always believe and defend freedom and answer questions about freedom with "whatever price freedom demands," so America is forever "the land of the free."