

Two Doors

Six and a half years ago, I met a most awesome young American --- at his funeral. Then, several months ago, I met an equally awesome young American --- also at his funeral. Both funerals were at the same church --- it was not the kind of *déjà vu* that one would like to have. Sadly, I must admit that I never knew either of them during their less than 25 year lifetimes. They are both now a part of the well over one million other young Americans who, during our 235 year existence, have given their last full measure of devotion toward keeping a wonderful idea alive and well. They are “forever young” and we are “forever indebted” to them. Included among these million plus are surely all races, all religions, all ethnic backgrounds, all educational and economic backgrounds, and both genders. So what is it that they were trying to do? They knew that in order for all the Americans who would come after them to have any hope of accomplishing their dreams, two doors must be opened and then kept open.

The first door is the door of freedom. Without that door being opened, the second door doesn't really matter much. The first door cannot be opened by any person individually---it is too enormous of a task for that---it is a group project on the grandest of scales. Also, just because the door is opened once does not at all guaranty that it will stay open for all time. The world never stops producing bullies and thugs who would like nothing better than to close that door and keep it closed. There is more than adequate evidence of this in recorded history as well as in present day events. Keeping the first door open has been costly. We have spent a tremendous amount of treasure, but that was just money. Those one million plus gave much more than money. They never achieved their own hopes and dreams. They never became old. They are forever young. They kept that first door open because they believed with all their heart and soul that America is more important than any one American. They were not selfish, they were selfless. They kept the first door open for you, for me, for your families, for your friends, for the millions you don't know or will ever know, for all of us. They kept that door open so that you, your families, your friends, and the millions you will never know would at least have the opportunity to open the second door.

The second door is the door of your own individual hopes and dreams. Opening it has never been a group project --- it is for you and you alone to open or not to open. In this building we celebrate a little bit each day as you open your own door just a little bit more. You are working on graduating from high school. To open it further will take consistent effort. If you tire, lose your grip, or just put forth minimal effort, it will likely close --- at least for the moment. It can be reopened with a new commitment and a dedication that is constant. You must never stop trying to open and then keep open that second door. Open it as wide as your ability will allow.

Although you must open the second door by yourself, know that you will have support --- you will have lots of cheerleaders. Who are they? They are your families, your friends, your teachers, and most importantly your cheerleaders include those two awesome young Americans whom I met at their funerals along with their one million plus forever young comrades. They gave up their hopes and dreams to keep the first door wide open so that you would have a chance to open the second door all by yourself. Was it all worth it? It is always best to let time be the judge of worth and as your life progresses, you will hopefully reflect from time to time on their gift to you. Those who are forever young hope that what you do with your second door was worth what they did for our first door. They made it possible. Now you make it happen.

I wish you well, as do your families, your friends, your teachers, and all the many fellow Americans you may never meet. Simply put, your success represents success for us all.

The second door awaits your push. Make it strong.

From a teacher and parent of a Marine who did come home