

I can remember so many moments when I found myself choking back tears of pride during a rendition of "God Bless America" or "The Star Spangled Banner". The older I get, the stronger my patriotism becomes. I finally realize the terrible price that was paid for my freedom. So many lives lost by unknown sons and daughters, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers.

When I was younger, I took our freedom for granted. I never went to bed to the sounds of gunfire and bombs, and never woke up fearful of going to the store or to school, should a suicide bomber decide my fate that day. I was 'free' to go where I pleased, when I wanted.

Now that I am a mother, especially since September 11, 2001, I have never been more grateful for being an American. Immediately following that awful day, an airplane or helicopter could not fly overhead without my stopping to look up to see if it might be friend or foe. I was pushing my three-year-old son in his swing when a group of military choppers from the army post nearby passed over us, so closely we could wave to the pilots. The booming sound of those machines sent chills down my spine...A visual reminder of our present world condition. For the first time my husband and I were afraid to place our children on the school bus, for fear a lunatic strapped in a vest full of explosives might decide a bus full of children would make a perfect target. With time, these jitters and my nightmares of plane crashes have subsided, and thank God, life is back to normal for the most part.

It wasn't until we were getting more detailed images of the Afghan people that my being an American truly became my sanctuary. The images of the Taliban and their abuses to the people, especially the women and children, showed me how truly blessed I am. I can't imagine not being able to show my face in public, let alone being beaten for such an offense. I've never seen my children go to bed hungry. I've never watched a person die from an exploding bomb or machine gun fire, or by hanging. I've never slept to the sounds of explosions in the distance, except for thunder in the sky on a stormy night. My daughter and her brothers are free to go to school, complete with desks, books, paper and pencils. We have clean, running water wherever we go, and we throw away more food in a day than these people may see in a month. We have a government with flaws, yet we are free to express our grievances without fear of beatings, or even death. I can worship God and read His Word openly. The blessings are endless.

My mother-in-law recently expressed her fear of traveling during the 4th of July weekend, and said she was afraid to wear an American t-shirt, should it make her a target for someone who may want to hurt us. I understood her fear, but at the same time, I told her that if I am to die as a result of a terrorist attack, I would be proud if my body were found with my flag visible for all to see. I am an unknown American: a housewife, a mother, a sister, and a friend. But for the first time in my life, I realize my role as a soldier. I understand what it means to be willing to die for my country, for my freedom, for my America.