

Liberty

Excerpt from The Remainder of My Life, by Troy Carlyle

Over the past few decades – up until September 11, 2001 – Americans enjoyed a remarkable technological and economic revolution. The personal computer has forever changed the world, connecting people in ways incomprehensible in the pre-PC era. We had also enjoyed a long period of relative peace.

More than that, we began to feel it was our birthright to feel safe. We began to equate freedom and democracy with the fact that we felt safe – and that was a big mistake.

Freedom is not safe. I would go as far as to say that freedom is diametrically opposed to safety. In terms of our children, would we prefer our three-year-old to be free or safe? I submit that we would constantly watch the three year old, forcibly protecting the child from his or her own choices and denying the child, in the process, any semblance of privacy or freedom.

But we adults prefer freedom over safety. Americans in particular have always jealously guarded our freedoms, even when it leaves gaps in our security. Police have to read suspected criminals their rights before questioning them. In America, the suspect is allowed to remain silent, even if this means we risk letting guilty people go free. Historically, Americans would rather let the guilty go free than imprison the innocent.

Freedom is dangerous. We delude ourselves if we think otherwise. But we have deluded ourselves. Unwisely thinking we could have freedom and safety, we have already begun the process of dismantling our freedom in favor of security.

We now live in a country where our phones can be wiretapped, our financial records and electronic communications viewed, and we ourselves can be indefinitely confined without cause or recourse. Our friends have begun to call us traitors for questioning all of this, even though they're the ones supporting the dismantling of the very heart of our democratic values.

Our founding fathers knew that freedom is hard won but easily lost. How did we become so cavalier with surrendering the freedoms our forefathers fought so bravely to preserve? Our birthright, as Americans, is freedom, not safety.

I, for one, prefer freedom, and I will not hold my government accountable if the cost of that freedom means that I will remain at risk. I prefer a just government over one that reduces my risk of bodily harm to zero. As inane as this must surely sound, until recent times the phrase “freedom isn't

free” has never been employed to imply that the cost *is* our freedom. The cost of freedom has always been, and will remain to be, our safety, or at least our absolute safety.

When I was in high school, I remember learning about our government’s use of “plausible deniability.” A nervous chuckle descended over the classroom as the students realized that one of the privileges of power in America is the authority to lie. We are naïve to forget that our children learn by example – that those of us learning about our government were also learning strong lessons about morality and ethics.

When the death of “family values” is decreed, I suggest we look further than a loving gay community struggling for fundamental human rights. Instead, perhaps we should look at the fact that we’ve been teaching our children for decades that it is OK to lie, cheat and steal, since that’s the way our government acts.

I may be accused of being a pacifist, even unpatriotic, but this is not the case. It is instead a profound love of my country that stirs me into motion. My purpose is to defend or in this case *recapture* our freedom. I insist, however, that the cost of that freedom cannot *be* our freedom. I insist that, while I will not hold my government accountable for my safety, I *will* hold it accountable for being truthful. They must be truthful *especially* when that truth is damaging or hurtful, so that our children may, by example, know the importance of integrity.

To paraphrase Patrick Henry, “You can have your safety. Give me liberty!” I will be neither safe nor fearful. I will not be imprisoned by my own small-mindedness. I will defend my country, but not at the cost of my integrity. I will love God, but not at the cost of reason. I understand that integrity requires courage, that there is no courage without risk. I will defend the liberties of *all* people, including the sick and disabled, and including the gay community. I am happy to be at risk when the cause is liberty – as causes go, there are none nobler.