

YOU NEVER SAID YOU WERE PERFECT, YOU ONLY SAID YOU WERE FREE
I THANK YOU FOR TRYING SO HARD TO KEEP IT THAT WAY FOR ME

This lyric is from a song I wrote in 1976 for our bicentennial.

As we celebrate another year of being the melting pot of the world, I thought it'd be nice if I shared what I think about when I look at my country.

* When the oppressed of the world cram into boats to get away from their broken homeland, it's America that their hearts always points them to.

* You can see the greatness of our country when you go to the library. Rows of biographies about people who came from humble and often times awful backgrounds who became great achievers and valuable contributors in our world. Most other countries don't have those stories because they don't have the opportunities that America gives us.

* The poor, homeless person in Mississippi has as much say in who will lead us as the affluent family in Beverly Hills.

* A country that encourages all dreamers to give those dreams your best shot.

* A country where a baby girl is not rendered a second class citizen, but encouraged to reach for her stars wherever they may shine.

* Where freedom is sacred even to those who would abuse it.

* Where belief in God can be freely expressed, no matter how far off the beaten path it may be.

America ... a country that has been bruised and challenged many times yet continues to keep growing and moving forward.

I was a teenager during the '60s. This was a time when America threw up. We were protesting wars, burning our draft cards, flags, bras and cities, shooting our President, Senators and Civil Rights leaders, smoking pot, promoting free sex and generally challenging everything the 'Leave-It-To-Beaver' generation held tightly to. Ah yes, the '60s.

America at it's worst and America at it's best.

That's what I love about this country. We go through some pretty crazy times that would devastate many other countries, but in America, these crazy times seem to make our country even stronger.

- * We didn't survive the Civil War, we came out stronger because of it.

- * We didn't survive the prohibition gangster times of the early 1900s, we came out stronger because of it.

- * We didn't survive the '60s, we came out stronger because of it.

- * We didn't survive Watergate, we came out stronger because of it.

- * And you can bet whatever challenges we face today and in the future, no matter how ugly it may get, we will come out stronger because of it.

That's what makes America so great.

Sure, I could write volumes of the many infractions that this country has stumbled through. I could write a column about everything that is wrong with this country and have enough material to keep my column in ink for a long time.

But the truth is that all those flag burners, protesters, fanatical groups and odd balls do not condemn this country nearly as much as they confirm how great this country is. This is why those boats full of oppressed people continue to point their hearts to the shores of America.

It's called freedom for ALL We the People ... have the opportunity to participate in this wonderful gift named Democracy.

Yes America, you never said you were perfect, but you always said you were free. I really am thankful that even a simple guy like me can dream big and be the best version of myself that I can be. Only in America.

Happy Birthday America.