

# What America Means to Me Today

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When the Founders talked about creating a “more perfect union,” they weren’t saying the country was perfect. They were saying it was worth improving, worth fighting for, and worth believing in. That idea shows up all through the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; freedom, responsibility, equality, and the chance for every person to shape their own future. I didn’t understand how big those ideas were when I was younger, but growing up in Annabella has helped me see what they look like in real life.

I’ve lived in this small town my whole life. When you grow up in a place where you can ride your four-wheeler up the mountain after school, fish in the creek on summer nights, or shoot hoops at the park until it gets dark, you start to realize that freedom isn’t just a word in a history book. It’s something you feel. It’s the space to breathe, to grow, to figure out who you want to be. It’s the chance to make choices that actually matter.

But the older I get, the more I understand that the freedom I enjoy didn’t just appear out of nowhere. People fought for it. People died for it. People stood up for principles they believed in, even when it cost them everything. When I think about soldiers who never came home, or families who sacrificed so someone else could live free, it hits me that liberty isn’t something I should ever take lightly. I get to live the life I have because others carried the weight first.

The founding documents talk a lot about rights, but they also talk about purpose. They say we’re supposed to keep working toward something better, not just for ourselves, but for everyone around us. That idea influences me more than anything. It makes me want to be someone who contributes instead of just coasting. Someone who respects the freedoms I’ve been given by using them well.

To me, America means opportunity, but it also means responsibility. It means being grateful for the people who came before me and doing my part to make sure the people who come after me have the same chances. It means treating others with respect, even when we disagree. It means working hard, helping neighbors, and remembering that this country is strongest when we’re united by the things we share instead of divided by the things we don’t.

I don’t know exactly what I’ll do with my life yet; maybe something outdoors, maybe a trade, maybe something I haven’t even thought of. But I do know this: I want to live in a way that

honors the freedom I've been given. I want to be someone who makes my community better, even in small ways. That's what the Founders hoped for, a country where ordinary people could live with purpose.

That's what America means to me today. It's not perfect, but it's ours to keep improving. And that's a responsibility I'm proud to carry.