

"The Fabrics of Freedom, Stitched as One"

Noelle McConnell

This teddy bear not only represents the principles and responsibilities of the Declaration of Independence, but America as a whole – including its people, hardships, triumphs, and enduring spirit.

In June 1776, Betsy Ross hand sewed one of the first American flags as the colonies declared themselves an independent nation. I chose to hand sew a teddy bear not only to honor her contribution, but also to symbolize how our country is homemade – created from whatever those brave Americans could gather together in pursuit of freedom.

I chose a teddy bear instead of a quilt or flag because, at the end of the day, all politicians, presidents, Republicans, Democrats, and leaders are simply grown-up children who once clutched teddy bears during their own fears and uncertainties. Independence does not remove our humanity; it reminds us of it.

You will notice a green patch with plants and a brown patch with paw prints. These patches represent the many elements that make America what it is, including its land and wildlife. They also symbolize that we are a broken and imperfect nation – a nation that can be mended, adjusted, and renewed. Like the bear waving, we welcome change and growth.

The missing left foot represents sacrifice. We all endure struggles and trials, yet like the bear, even when wounded, we remain connected. We may be scarred, but we are not alone.

The camouflage-printed ear recognizes the protection provided by the military and serves as a tribute to my grandfather, who bravely fought in World War II.

The button eye and felt eye represent differing perspectives. Though they are made of different materials, they serve the same purpose. In the same way, Americans may see the world differently, yet each perspective holds value.

The fabric choices are intentional. The bear is primarily red, white, and blue – colors that represent America – but the variety of patterns, shades, and textures symbolizes our diversity. We all come from different backgrounds and experiences, yet despite those differences, we are united. We are each a unique shade of red, white, and blue.

Finally, there is the heart. Every limb, difference, hardship, and story leads back to one central truth: love. We may be individually independent, but we are collectively united. We are many stories stitched together into one nation. One country. One heart.