INPSIRATIONAL SPEECH

FOR

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“America My Second Motherland”

In New York Harbor there stands a symbol of freedom, welcome, possibility, and acceptance. There is a poem inscribed at the base of the statue. The poem is by Emma Lazarus and begins, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free….” America has been a second motherland to millions of people from all over the world, and whether they arrived to seek their fortune or to escape a harrowing existence, or were forced to leave the land they loved, it was America that embraced each one and offered the chance to find opportunities not only to survive but also to **thrive**.

How do you define **YOUR** America, **YOUR** homeland? Think about it. Imagine that you’ve been given the chance to take a blank canvas and then imagine that it is up to you to create the life in which you want to live …and it would all be included on that canvas. I think about this a lot because you see; America has been the second canvas that I have been blessed with. It is my second homeland. Many years ago, as a political war victim and homeless, desperate refugee, I was kicked out of my original homeland and somehow, through grace and faith and incredible generosity, America became my second homeland, took me in, provided unconditional motherly love, and allowed me the opportunity to paint my second canvas in life. Make no mistake. That canvas was almost blank when I began and I barely had the tools and materials to make that canvas come alive, but with the inspiration I discovered in my new homeland I was able to dream and then to have the privilege to work and build the future.

America the motherland has so much to offer, but it is up to each one of us to make the most out of the gift we’ve been given, and that is to live here and to create the lives and honor the liberties for which we work so tirelessly. I once heard a quote about freedom that states, “Freedom means the opportunity to be what you **never thought** you would be.” I don’t think it’s possible to overstate how much that means to me!! I came from **NOTHING**…. literally, and America’s arms were open and ready for me to work hard and honor my new motherland.

It’s been said that this country is a nation filled with immigrants and whether your family arrived on the Mayflower almost four hundred years ago or you arrived last month, the opportunity to create **YOUR** life has been preserved from generation to generation. I know of a woman whose father’s family came over from Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century practically in cargo class. The woman’s father was only a boy at the time, probably not more than ten years old. He was from the Ukraine and he and his family was fleeing Soviet oppression. He knew no English and his family began their lives in America in a tenement apartment on the Lower East Side of New York. Unable to speak the language, cramped and crowded into a tiny apartment that housed many more fellow refugees, all that lay ahead was the unknown. Years later, the woman I knew asked her father what it was like to arrive to America, through Ellis Island after such a difficult and frightening voyage. His response was brief. He said, “We finally were able to find a spot in which to sleep and when I woke up the next morning and heard the sound of the church bells ringing, **I never felt so free**.” He was a simple, humble, smart young boy who used his gift of freedom in his new motherland well. In his first year of school in America he won an award for his outstanding class work. He went on to become a successful professional Certified Public Accountant. He never ever lost his respect for the gift of that blank canvas that he was given when he arrived in his new country. He worked hard, made something of his life, and spent every day honoring his opportunity and freedom... and he made sure to teach his children to honor and respect America just as he did.

Each one of us has our own unique idea of what “The American Dream” means to us, but for me, this most generous motherland of America offers three other characteristics in addition to **Freedom.** We have to consider that **Beauty**, **Opportunity,** and **Prosperity** are also the gifts we have at our disposal to use as tools as we paint the canvas of our lives. These features are extended to all new incoming immigrants embarking on their new journeys of discovering and realizing the American Dream. In 1918, the composer Irving Berlin wrote a love song to this wonderful country of ours. It was called “God Bless America” and has become almost as popular as the national anthem itself. He too, was an immigrant and in his lyrics for this song, he described the infinite beauty of this country:

“From the mountains

To the prairies

To the Oceans white with foam,

God Bless America, my home sweet home.”

From “sea to shining sea” this motherland of ours provides a breathtaking backdrop for us to visualize how we will make our mark in our lives and in our country- **FOR** our country.

**Opportunity** is a natural extension of freedom. With freedom comes choice and infinite possibility. It’s up to each one of us to determine how hard we are willing to work to make our dreams come true. Albert Einstein has said, “All that is valuable in human society depends upon the **opportunity** for development accorded the individual.” As Americans and as people who live within this context of the United States, we must acknowledge that with freedom comes the opportunity for good, hard, honest work in order to build a strong and better life. Another very smart American, Thomas Edison reminds us, “Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and **looks like work**.” You know what? It **IS** work!! But this country allows the **OPPORTUNITY** to explore one’s options in life. It’s up to us to take the challenge to add depth and meaning to our personal canvas.

The fourth piece of the puzzle that is available to us here in America is **Prosperity**, but for possibly the first time in our lives, I would like for us to take a look at what prosperity **really** means. The easy definition of prosperity is, “the good life,” or, in other words, “good fortune, ease, plenty, comfort, security, well-being.” It does not necessarily have to mean being rich by any measure. Thanks to the freedoms we have here in America, we have the gift of being able to really look and see what **prosperity** means in our lives. I think that with all of the financial crises we have endured in recent years, we can see that it doesn’t have to mean monetary or physical possessions. Prosperity comes with having **enough**- having health, contentment, satisfaction after a good hard day’s work has been accomplished, and knowing that we have the chance to provide for our families. Prosperity is really **gratitude and appreciation**.

I have to also say that America is **not perfect** but our freedom allows me to be able to say that!! America has its flaws but it’s still probably the most wonderful motherland on this planet.

It has been \_\_\_\_\_\_ years since I became a citizen of the United States. I know how precious it is to live here and to be able to create a fulfilling life. Every day there are threats around us that conspire to destroy the precious balance of life in America. We are all here as one community united in finding respect and the balance in life so that we can all live the American Dream. I ask all of us to unite together and to stand up, speak out, speak for, and fight to protect and to preserve the America that is so special to all of us. We must remember through respect and community action that this country is for **ALL** of us and we must do whatever it takes to preserve America and protect it from those who seek to destroy the dream in order to rebuild it to fit their own styles. This land is **OUR LAND**. It is a gift from our founding fathers and we must make sure that our children and their children inherit the legacy. It is our collective mandate to preserve and protect the Constitution, the **foundation** of America.

I will never forget the compassion and generosity that greeted me when I first arrived as a lost homeless refugee. Let us continue to build a nation in which everyone has a place and the chance to live the dream. God Bless America!! Thank you all!