

I CRIED

“You're a lucky little girl. Be thankful you were born in America.” Grandmother dropped the *Life* Magazine onto the floor next to the rocking chair and held her arms out to me. I crawled into her warm arms and felt safe. She told me a fairy tale. I glanced down at the magazine and saw black and white pictures of people with eyes too large, faces too thin. Rags hung on bodies made of sticks.

The American flag held out the window of a race car as it takes its victory lap. It makes me cry. The Star-spangled Banner. It makes me cry. Thousands of kitchen matches struck at once at a Fourth of July Celebration in a football stadium. It makes me cry. The color guard marching down the street in a parade. It makes me cry.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic played at a Presidential Inauguration. It makes me cry.

I read about comedian, Yakov Smirnoff, who left Russia and loves America so much his doorbell plays “The Star-Spangled Banner.” I cried.

The Eagle has landed! It makes me cry.

“Don't be silly! It's no big deal. What's there to cry about?”

What do you call this wonderful feeling that makes you cry? I thought perhaps I was just too emotional at first. Then I realized it was patriotism, pride in my country. Pride in belonging to something so wonderful. What a joint effort!

I felt this way even through the Vietnam era. I displayed the American flag on my car window. It was tiny, but people noticed. I didn't understand the criticism.

“You're lucky to be born in America” echoed in my memory.

What pride I felt, and how I cried!

I cried on! My heart full of joy and so very proud of my country. Scandals arose, but I was proud. The country goes on despite them. A strong place to raise a family, still better than anywhere else. A place to work on making dreams come true. A safe place, where survival comes easier than other places. A place where we can worship God in our own way. A place where we can speak up, talk back and make our feelings known. A vast melting pot of many races, all striving to make their dreams come true, with equal opportunity to work hard and accomplish.

Not a perfect place, but a place with the possibility to be anything you wanted to be. A place where you are free to succeed or to fail.

My son was born just nine days before the nation's 200th birthday. I wanted to teach him patriotism, but wasn't sure how to go about it. Perhaps by example, perhaps by telling him stories. Whenever an example came up, I pointed it out to him. I repeated to him the words of my grandmother, "You're a lucky little boy to have been born in America." I didn't know whether it sank in or not.

When he was three, he began collecting American flags. He was fascinated by them. He liked toys, but he wanted flags. We bought him the tiny ones on sticks. We taught him about respect for the flag, "Never let the flag fall on the ground. Put it in a place of honor. A flag isn't a toy."

A Kindergarten program at Thanksgiving. I sat in the row of chairs, watching as each child got up and told for what they were thankful.

"I'm thankful for my friends."

"I'm thankful for my mommy and daddy and baby sister."

“I'm thankful for my dog.”

“I thankful for my turtle.”

“I'm thankful for my Grandma.”

“I'm thankful for my room.”

“I'm thankful for my kitties.”

I slid down in the chair, wondering when they would ever get to Zach. I wondered what he would be thankful for. I thought maybe he'd say he was thankful for his mommy and daddy, and maybe his cats.

He was the last one to stand. In a loud clear voice, he said, “I'm thankful for America.”

I cried.