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AMERICA, OUR HOPE IS IN YOU

One and a half years ago I knew only one America--an America that gave me an equal chance in the struggle for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If I were asked then--"What does America mean to you?"--I would answer without any hesitation and with all sincerity--"America means freedom, equality, security, and justice.

The other night while I was preparing for this speech, I asked myself this same question--"What does America mean to you?" I hesitated--I was not sure of my answer. I wondered if America still means and will mean freedom, equality, security, and justice when some of its citizens were segregated, discriminated against, and treated so unfairly. I knew I was not the only America seeking an answer.

Then I remembered that old saying--All the answers to the future will be found in the past for all men. So unmindful of the searchlights reflecting in my windows, I sat down and tried to recall all the things that were taught to me in my history, sociology, and American life classes. This is what I remembered:

America was born in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, and for 167 years it has been held as the hope, the only hope, for the common man. America has guaranteed to each and all, native and foreign, the right to build a home, to earn a livelihood, to worship, think, speak, and act as he pleased--as a free man equal to every other man.

Every revolution within the last 167 years which had for its aim more freedom was based on her constitution. No cry from an oppressed people has ever gone unanswered by her. America froze, shoeless, in the snow at Valley Forge, and battled for her life at Gettysburg. She gave the world its greatest symbols of democracy: George Washington, who freed her from tyranny; Thomas Jefferson, who defined her democratic course; and Abraham Lincoln, who saved her and renewed her faith.

Sometimes America failed and suffered. Sometimes she made mistakes, great mistakes, but she always admitted them and tried to rectify all the injustice that flowed from them. I noticed that the major trend in American history has been towards equality and fair play for all. America hounded and harassed the Indians, then remembering that these were the first Americans, she gave them back their citizenship. She enslaved the negroes, then again remembering Americanism, she wrote out the emancipation proclamation. She persecuted the German-Americans during the first World War, then recalling that America was born of those who came from every nation seeking liberty and justice, she repented. Her history is full of errors but with each mistake she has learned and has marched forward onward toward a goal of security and peace and a society of free men where the understanding that all men are created equal, an understanding that all men whatever their race, color, or religion be given an equal opportunity to serve themselves and each other according to their needs and abilities.

I was once again at my desk. True, I was just as much embittered as any other evacuee. But I had found in the past the answer to my question. I had also found my faith in America--faith in the America that is still alive in the hearts, minds, and consciences of true Americans today--faith in the American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play that will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of actions and achievements and not on the basis of physical characteristics.

Can we the graduating class of Amsche Senior High School, still believe that America means freedom, equality, security, and justice? Do I believe this? Do my classmates believe this? Yes, with all our hearts, because in that faith, in that hope, is my future, our future, and the world's future.