



On a chilly, Thursday morning, with hair blowing in my face and the great American flag waving behind me, I finally understood what it truly means to be an American, and the significance of the flag. The ideals of liberty and freedom, perseverance and hope, success and sacrifice, concepts that form the foundation of this country, have always been important to me. I always thought that I understood the magnitude of the American spirit. I have always treasured my freedom. I always knew that it wasn't my right to be an American; it's a privilege that, in the grand scheme of things, only a small amount of people will earn. Yet, as I was standing next to the flag, I realized what the stars and stripes are for. Although they historically symbolize states and colonies, they are a representation of the autonomy that we are so privileged to experience. Tears welled in my eyes watching the ceremony because I knew that I was witnessing a celebration not only of a hero, but of the American creed. As the flag was carefully folded and presented to the family, I came to the realization that this country does not rest on mere ideas. It rests on the backs of the patriots, both those who have gone before us, and those who are now giving their lives for the rest of us at home.

To say that I'm invested in America's history and culture would be accurate. I love my country, and I am always inspired by our service men and women. Participating in the funeral service fueled my desire to serve my country. The brave man that we celebrated at the service made me realize that this country is nothing without bravery. As Americans, we are our strongest when we grab ahold of bravery and courage, when we push forward in spite of the trials that we face. In every struggle that this country has faced, men and women like the man we celebrated on that Thursday, took hold of this country and guided it towards victory.



As I walked up and down the aisles of graves, I felt a chill go through me. I was standing amongst people who gave their lives for mine. These are people who lived and served years before I had even taken my first breath. I will never shake the hand of those men and women

who have passed, but being at the cemetery made me realize that, although I never met them, I have the ability to carry on their legacies of courage and patriotism. As I was weaving my way through the graves, I just happened to look up to see the America flag proudly waving in the wind. It made me smile to think that the flag was watching over them even after they passed. I realized that the purpose of the flag isn't only to declare freedom; it's to defend freedom, just like our valiant military.



I will always be grateful to our Armed Forces because they inspire me to stand up for my country and encourage me to never lose faith in America, no matter how dark and unpredictable the future may seem. I still believe in the promise of America, and I dream of a time when America returns to its status as a city on a hill, a haven for those who are lost, and those who yearn for freedom. I owe all of my renewed passion for this incredible nation to the men and women who sacrifice their lives for our land, and to the Patriot Guard, for reminding me that there is a history and tradition of heroism in America, and that the American spirit will always prevail.

