

## Generation

# Many ways to celebrate America

America celebrates its 240th anniversary of gaining independence Monday and, for most of us, it's a day of barbecues, fireworks and lots of fun with family and friends.

When members of the Second Continental Congress sat down in Philadelphia so long ago to adopt the final draft of the Declaration of Independence, I wonder if it occurred to them that what they had in front of them would become the foundation of our country's existence for generations to come and that the words "all men are created equal" would forever play a role in our government's quest to protect all its citizens.

Perhaps these wise men did foresee that their document would stand the test of time, but they didn't celebrate like we do today after John Hancock started the ball rolling as the first signer.

The War of Independence dragged on and only by 1783 did July Fourth take shape as a major holiday. In 1941, Congress declared it a federal holiday.

Written by Thomas Jefferson and revised by John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Jefferson, all 56 men who ultimately signed the Declaration of Independence

showed great courage because announcing independence from Great Britain was an act of treason and punishable by death.



*Peg DeMarco*

Thanks to these brave men, businesses close, banks and postal workers breathe a sigh of relief, and three-day weekends from

work are relished by most of the workforce in America. Hot dogs, parades and fireworks help us maintain our Americana spirit, with a little of Mom's apple pie thrown in for dessert.

John Adams, our second president, would have been pleased if he were alive today and could share in the celebration. He was absolutely right when he said in a letter to his wife, Abigail: "I believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be celebrated by pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other ..." He probably would have loved s'mores around a campfire.

Many people are critical of this

great nation and the freedom it brings with it, and they should be ashamed. The right to voice what is in one's head and heart is something we all take for granted, but in many countries people don't enjoy those basic rights. People in certain parts of the world can't openly worship as we can here.

Self-expression is repressed and talent goes to waste because many people don't have the right to express themselves. Think of the lost talent that could have contributed to the good of mankind, but couldn't because they weren't free to do so.

When I recently called my sister Jan to check in with her and found out she was in Alaska with her husband, Mike, it was a surprise to hear about her most recent trek across the U.S. Her family has always been happy wanderers during vacation time, from the Grand Canyon to the beaches of Boston.

They have visited 48 states during 20-plus years of camping and touring with the kids, and Alaska and Hawaii were the last two frontiers to conquer. After this trip, only Hawaii remains.

So, this made me think about how lucky we as Americans are

because we all have the freedom to discover, learn and embrace all parts of the land we call home. Sure, it takes money, but you can start with the states that are the closest and work on a budget you can live with.

Matt Kepnes, better known as Nomadic Matt, is the author of the New York Times best-seller, "How to Travel the World on \$50 a Day," and he's got plenty of tips for traveling in America. Visit his information-packed website at [www.nomadicmatt.com](http://www.nomadicmatt.com) and read his blog. There's no grass growing under his feet.

My sister has often told me it's difficult to pick a favorite state because there was so much to see and appreciate in all the states they visited. I'm sure Alaska will be somewhere at the top. Where else can you sign up for a glacier tour?

There is great beauty in America, so don't let it fall by the wayside and be overshadowed by naysayers who criticize America and our magnificent country. We have a tremendous reason to celebrate, and I hope every one of you has a safe and very happy July Fourth.

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