

ON BECOMING AN AMERICAN

David Lewis - 22 May 2009

Congratulations Americans! on your newly attained American citizenship, and welcome to your new home.

And young Ladies and Gentlemen, listen carefully for these words are for you too. This won't take long, but it is important.

Our country is a vast continent, rich in varying land, from brown desert to green forest, from warm beaches to frozen glaciers.

And our country is the richest, because it has the greatest mix of different people on earth. And it's this diversity of origin, viewpoint and custom, together with our spirit, hope and desire that make our country the land of opportunity.

Here you can be master of your own destiny.

Here you can live *the good life*, but more important you can live *a good life*.

Here you can achieve a very special quality of personal, family and professional life. And I'm not talking about quantity of life - yes, you can have a 5 bedroom house, a porsche, and the latest iPhone - lots of good stuff.

But what really matters is a true quality of life that comes from strong self-esteem - that quiet inner strength and self-reliance that makes each one of us feel good about ourself. And, as Denis Waitley reminds us, self-esteem is built on four special personal values. These four special personal values that make each of us feel good about ourselves are:

First, A sense of belonging

We all want to feel we're a part of something larger than ourselves.

We all like to be part of a warm family.

We all like to be in the middle of a team and have good friends.

Right here in Terrace Park we feel we belong in this wonderful school, where Linda Lee and her strong and caring staff grow all of you balanced, inquisitive and confident young guys and gals.

In America, we all came from somewhere else - ourselves or our forefathers - to find a place where we could belong.

Here in America, we can truly belong.

The second special personal value is:

2. A sense of individuality

Not a single one of us is exactly like another person. We each have unique combinations of talents that complement each other and together make a great team that can do anything.

A good baseball team need pitchers and hitters - some baseball pitchers can't hit well and most hitters can't pitch at all.

But that's what makes it work - *each one of us has special skills that together, make an extraordinarily powerful team.*

It's our individual differences that make each of us special, and in our country we cherish these individual specialties.

The third special personal value is:

3. A sense of worthiness

This means being able to say to yourself 'I'm glad I'm me.'

I don't need to be, look or think like anyone else.

I feel good about my body, my ideas, my actions, my preferences and my circumstances.

This is sometimes hard for us to remember, if we feel attacked or if someone hurts our feelings. But if we can understand that the person who hurt our feelings did so because he or she was hurting, maybe we can remember to be careful not to hurt other people's feelings in the future.

And in this way we all help each other be able to say 'I'm glad I'm me' and I feel good about myself.

The fourth special personal value is:

4. A sense of control and competence

This means having a belief in our ability to control what happens to us in a changing, uncertain world.

A belief that if I have a dream, I work hard and smart and live with honesty, I can succeed and live the quality of life that I have chosen for me and my family.

Our country has
space (land),

resources (cost of living can be very low here),
creative enthusiasm (*especially in our young people and new Americans*)
and **opportunity** (there are 23 million home businesses - that's 23 million people pursuing their dreams and building a quality life for their families).

In short, A sense of control and competence means being able to say 'I can be master of my own destiny'.

Our country is not perfect - we create problems, unhappiness, violence and crimes that hurt us deeply.

But preventing problems and unhappiness all starts with each one of us making a lifelong commitment to live a quality of life that comes from strong self-esteem - that quiet inner strength and self-reliance that makes each one of us feel good about ourselves. *It all starts with me.*

So let us all be thankful for all the good that we do have in our country - trust me, you cannot know how good this is in America, if you have never lived anywhere else. *American citizenship is not just a right, it is an unbelievable privilege.*

And let each one of us - new Americans, young ladies and gentlemen, teachers, parents, mentors, friends and strangers - make a special effort to nurture in ourselves:
the sense of belonging,
the respect for our individuality,
a sense of competence,
and the joy in being able to say 'I'm glad I'm me'.

Thank you, and New Americans, young ladies and gentlemen especially, have a Wonderful Life in America!