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“The true test of the American ideal is whether we're able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them.”

– Barack Obama (Patriotism Quotes)

When Barack Obama was elected as president in November 2008, the citizens of the United States were surged with hope and optimism. Changes were to be made and new beginnings were promised. However, currently the United States can be a discouraging place to live in at times. The unemployment rate in the state of Michigan alone is at a shocking 14.2 % (Local Area Unemployment Statistics). The Big Three automotive companies that empowered this country are facing deficit and bankruptcy. Jobs are being outsourced overseas. Overall morale is at a low. However, despite all of these things, we have reason to be proud to be American. The founding fathers established this great country and all it has to offer. We now need to do our part and try to make it the best place it can be. Patriotism is defined as love and/or devotion to one's country. The average citizen can display patriotism in a plethora of small yet significant ways. From voting, showing respect for other cultures, embracing your rights, to honoring the flag, there are plenty of ways for an American to be patriotic and show love and devotion for their homeland. To me, having patriotism means having a desire to improve your country by doing your small part to make a positive impact on everyday life.

When one truly cares about something, they want to have their voice heard and their opinion count. Voting is an imperative means of showing patriotism. In the recent 2008 presidential election, nearly 68 million people voted for Obama, and 58 million voted for McCain (Election Center 2008). Americans wanted to have their voice heard. Voting at the national level is not the only way to show patriotism. The building blocks that create a solid country have their foundation at the local level. Participating in local elections is another great way to show patriotism and a desire to make a positive impact, beginning with your own community.

America is often referred to as a melting pot. The diverse mix of cultures, lifestyles, religious beliefs, and languages is what makes America a truly unique place. Having patriotism means to accept these other ways of life, even if they are different from your own. Being tolerant and accepting is a patriotic way to embrace America and its people. I belong to a Slovak Folk Dance group and we often perform at various cultural events with other dance ensembles that represent other countries. We recently performed at the Arab International Festival in Dearborn and were warmly welcomed by the festival and its people. People want to learn about other cultures, it is just that false stereotypes or misconceptions can sometimes stand in the way. I am often overwhelmed by the positive reactions of people when they see us dance. They appreciate what we do and want to learn more about it, even though it is new to them. There are many ethnic festivals with new music to hear, delicious food to sample, and people to meet. A way to show patriotism is to be accepting and embrace America's melting pot of cultures.

America is the land of opportunity, the land of the free. We have the right to speak our mind and stand up for what we believe in. The first amendment to the Constitution states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” (United States Constitution) My uncle is an avid user of his first amendment rights. He was unhappy because the main road near his house in Sterling Heights was proposed to be widened. He went to city hall and voiced his opinion. They took his ideas into consideration and after much deliberation, the road was not widened thanks to my uncle’s feedback. Having patriotism and being a responsible citizen means to take an interest in your community and show the desire to improve the quality of life for yourself and the rest of the community.

While attending a Tigers game on a clear sunny day in July, the crowd is asked to stand. The men remove their baseball caps and everyone respectfully turns toward the flag while placing their hands over their heart. Honoring the flag and participating in the National Anthem and pledge of allegiance are basic yet powerful ways to show patriotism. These are symbols and reminders of what our country stands for and they should be treated with respect and high regard. Flying an American flag in front of your house and following the proper flag conduct when using it is a patriotic way to show support for one’s homeland.

The average American citizen can show their patriotism in a large variety of ways but in my opinion, the people who are most patriotic are the veterans themselves. We have their actions and courage to thank for the lives we lead today. From veterans from past wars such as World War II or the Vietnam War, to the more recent veterans of Iraq, each and every person who dedicated their life is an example of the strongest and most devoted level of patriotism. At least 3,110 military men and women have died in Iraq since 2003 (MSNBC). I recently attended the annual Memorial Day parade in my city of Sterling Heights. It was very moving to see all of the veterans marching together and being honored. The community clapped and showed great respect for these men and women. Serving in the military is not everyone's calling or way for them to show patriotism, but those that choose to do so should be highly regarded.

Even though at times it may seem like our country has its ups and downs, the United States is overall a great country to live in. We have so many freedoms, resources, and opportunities just waiting to be used at our fingertips. Patriotism is a part of everyday life as a means to show appreciation and love for our homeland. Showing patriotism need not be a grand and courageous act for the average citizen, instead it can be shown in small ways that improve the community. Voting, embracing our country's mosaic of people, exercising your rights, honoring the flag, and honoring our veterans are ways that I can show my patriotism and devotion to my country. Even though people have negative opinions at times about our government or economic situation, I still believe this country will rebound with a positive and hopeful attitude from the people. Patriotism should not

be reserved only for annual holidays like Memorial Day or the Fourth of July; instead it should be used in everyday life. So thank you to our citizens, soldiers and veterans, for giving us the freedom we have today.

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