

# Reflecting on the Fourth of July



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## [About the Author](#)

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In fiscal year 2014, New American Pathways helped 237 new Americans apply for their citizenship. So far this year, we have helped 303 apply for citizenship

July 4 is just around the corner. What does that date mean to most Americans? Hot dogs, water parks, fireworks, an extra day off work? If you find yourself near a parade you might hear a band playing a rousing march or two to help connect the holiday with its patriotic roots. If you're an immigrant, chances are you'll feel a tighter, more emotional connection on this day than most native born Americans.

I grew up in South Africa, where we were steeped in the idea of America – we watched *The Brady Bunch*, we witnessed the occasional Corvette, and we envied the rare few who told us about their trips to Disneyland and other exotic American locales. In addition to the tantalizing allure of life in America, we were eager to leave South Africa, a country whose legal system fostered a strict separation of races, granting second class citizenship to the vast majority of its countrymen.

In 1979, when I was a teenager, my family immigrated to the United States. After years of imagining America, I now got to experience it firsthand. The first harsh realities were the shock of consecutive 100 degree days in Dallas and realizing that while I spoke English fluently, I couldn't understand half of what my fellow Texans were saying. But then things got easier, and I settled into my life as a normal American teenager with normal American teenage concerns.

But here's the thing. I saw my new country through a different lens than my normal American teenage peers. I now had what so many people around the globe covet: the right to live and breathe and enjoy life as an American. I would never take this privilege for granted.

Thirty-six years later, at the age of 50, I still see my country through this comparative lens. I have all sorts of issues and concerns with our country and our elected officials and our media and our environment and our business climate and ... But the beauty of it all is that I can have issues, I can advocate, I can affect change. I am free, and I will never take this for granted.

Every year on July 4 I eat hot dogs and enjoy fireworks just like every other American, sure. But I never forget to say "Thank you" to my mom and my step-father who sacrificed so much back in 1979 to bring my brothers and me to America. And I say "Thank you" to those who came before me who sacrificed even more to lay the foundation for what is still the greatest country on this planet.