

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Let freedom ring ... and responsibility, too! With the 231st anniversary of our great nation upon us (it will have passed by the time this issues hits the streets), let the bells of freedom sound out! Let the echoes of liberty fill every valley!

But let *responsibility* have its day in the sun as well. Always, freedom and responsibility run together. In our clamor for freedom, a clamor deeply inscribed in our DNA from birth, too often the responsibility that freedom brings is lost in the shuffle.

The *Statue of Liberty* remains a symbol of our freedom around the globe. As Americans, we are proud of our freedom, and rightly so. But what about responsibility for this freedom? Where is the *statue of responsibility* for the freedoms we so cherish?

Like everything else (the point that needs to be made), freedom has a context. We have a right to *free* speech, but we do not have a right to shout out *fire, fire*—on a ruse or on a bet from a friend—in a theatre or stadium packed with people.

We have a right to *freedom* of expression, but Don Imus goes overboard when his words, freely expressed over the air waves of talk radio, are laced with arrows of the dark and the ugly.

Simply put, words have consequences and we need to be sensitive to the context. It is the context that gives rise to the meanings our words bring.

The larger problem is that when freedom runs wild, with no regard for consequences, the quality of life is diminished for all.

Many (but not all) of the popular song lyrics in contemporary hip-hop music are more than a little offensive. In degrading women and others, they feed-in to an energy and a spirit that diminish us all.

Freedom and consequences. Within our freedoms, we also have a *right* to purchase age-appropriate products from the store down the street or the mall on the other side of town.

With regard to gun control, for example, we have a right to purchase a gun and to defend ourselves. But again, owning a gun has a context, and responsibility for gun ownership bears an enormous burden.

Just because we're free to buy a gun doesn't mean that *everybody running out and purchasing a gun* is suddenly good for our culture. Research shows that most domestic violence with hand guns could have been avoided had there not been a hand gun on the premises to begin with.

It is incredible how some people actually believe that owning a hand gun makes them safer. In fact, the opposite is closer to the truth.

Again, the question becomes, where's the *responsibility*? We're quick to exercise our freedoms, but what about the responsibility for the exercise of those freedoms?

In emphasizing responsibility, we're reminded how the consequences of our actions are always more complicated (and therefore, bear a greater burden) than the causes.

All the time in our lives, stuff happens that is out of our control. We say something, do something and suddenly, in a moment, a tempest has brewed and there's no peace on the home front.

Let freedom ring, but do the loving thing. As a prelude to any of our serious decision-making, don't we need to ask ourselves, *Am I doing the loving thing?* Is the comment I am about to make, the action I am about to commit, intended to *make things better*? Does it see the big picture?

The *loving thing* takes the context seriously because that is the nature of love. Love seeks to see into the heart of every human being and discern what the situation calls for. Sometimes that means being patient and kind. But other times it may well mean being resolute and firm. Sometimes, it's a *yes*; other times it's a *no*.

Let freedom ring across our great nation on our 231st birthday! But let love with responsibility win the day!