

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Aren't we all Americans? By the time this issue of the *Miami Laker* hits the newsstand, the sun will have set on the most drawn out Presidential election in our nation's history. Either *Obamania* will be readying itself to occupy the White House or our 44th President will be John McCain, the maverick Senator from Arizona.

If you're a regular *Echoes*' reader, you've no doubt noticed that my enthusiasm for Barack Obama has been difficult to conceal. However, if John McCain is the victor, then it's with President McCain that we will turn the page and prepare to embrace the future.

Either way, no matter who wins, it will be time to come together as a nation. It will be time to heal the wounds of the hotly contested campaign; time to turn down the temperature on the finger pointing and labeling.

On November 5th, it will be time to move beyond the contentiousness of red-state, blue-state; time to shut the door on the *real* America versus the *other* America, or the *real* Virginia (or Florida, or whatever it is) and the *other* Virginia. It will be time to celebrate the richness of our democracy.

One of the greatest strengths of our nation is our incredible diversity. We're a nation of immigrants. Indeed, the vast majority of us bear the seed of ancestors who, coming from their homeland, got off a boat sometime, somewhere.

All of which serves as a humble reminder: *Aren't we all Americans?*

As Americans, God calls us to the *high ground* of our faith and of our national inheritance. On this high ground, all people are honored and respected. They don't have to *look* like us, *act* like us, *talk* like us, *think* like us, *believe* like us or *live* where we do. Again, our diversity is to be celebrated.

In America, there is no *right* or *wrong* religion. There is no *right* or *wrong* way to vote. There is no *right* or *wrong* gender orientation. Our Constitution grants us the freedoms to think for ourselves, believe as the spirit leads us, and to become the person God calls us to become.

We're Americans—one people, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

One nation/ one common future. In reflecting on our robust diversity in America, there was a poignant picture in a recent copy of the New Yorker magazine; it was a picture taken at Arlington National Cemetery of a mother pressing her head against the gravestone of her son, a 20-year-old soldier who had been killed in Iraq. Clearly, the mother was grieving her deceased son.

On the headstone were engraved his name and his awards—Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. Above his name, there wasn't a *cross*; and there wasn't a *Star of David*. There was a *crescent* and a *star* to denote his Islamic faith.

His name was **Kareem Rashad Sultan Khan**. He wasn't a Christian; he wasn't Jewish. He was a Muslim. And he was an American who died fighting for his country—our country. Did you know that of our military's 1.4 million troops, 3,700 of them are Muslims?

All the time, we hear expressed fears about people being Arab or Muslim. In other words, about someone, or some group of people, being different.

Again, aren't we all Americans? Living under the same Constitution? With the same rights and liberties?

Kareem was just a young man, full of hope and possibilities like most young persons. He loved the Dallas Cowboys, for example. And he loved to play video games with his twelve year-old step-sister. Recently, he had sent his family some pictures of him playing soccer with Iraqi children and hugging a young Iraqi boy.

Sadly, tragically, he died when an improvised bomb blew up during a routine house search. Again, he was an American.

As a new President is inaugurated in the first month of the New Year, a new era is upon us. With the new era comes new expectations—expectations that will propel us to live out the best and the highest of the truths to which God calls us, that we might be **one nation with one common future**.