

## ON CELEBRATING THE FOURTH OF JULY

As I was preparing for this month's column, I received a beautiful piece that was sent to me by a dear friend who lives in Oro Fino, in Northern California. Located west of Yreka and near the Oregon border, this heaven of a place has been home to Patricia McCallister for many years. In the 1970's we owned adjoining 40-acre parcels in this magnificent area and, as our family spent most of our vacations there, our friendship grew over the years.

In the piece, she tells of her son-in-law's suicide on July 4, 1998, following years of health problems, both physical and emotional. Jim, an Army veteran, was a helicopter medic in Vietnam. "Almost every night, he told me, he had nightmares about Vietnam," Pat writes. Her dad was in the Navy. Her brother, a career Air Force pilot, served two tours in Vietnam. Her brother-in-law was killed in Korea, two weeks after his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Pat has, since the Vietnam era, been a peace activist; however, she has always had great respect for those in the military. I find her words very fitting on this Fourth of July weekend and thought I'd share excerpts with you.

"I remember short red firecrackers joined together with a web of string. We always lit several at once then dashed away seconds before the explosive staccato began to assault our eardrums. Sparklers generated silvery arcs of light as my brother and I swirled them in the air, bright blurs like a lighted windmill going full-tilt. Mouth-watering food always played a major role; Mother's delectable southern fried chicken cooked with the skins on (now politically incorrect), corn on the cob, and four salads: macaroni, potato, fruit and mixed green. I never felt compelled to choose one or two when all four were available. To top it off, we always had thin slices of super sweet and really red watermelon, no spoons required, usually from our own garden.

There was always a parade with flags rippling in the breeze and my throat can still remember the lump that always grew when the high-school band marched by, playing John Philip Sousa's Stars and Stripes Forever, the strutting drum major out front with marchers on either side proudly displaying the colors of our nation and our state. It was the late forties; the "good war" had ended and peace had come at last.

This year, I'm planning to celebrate the Fourth a little differently. I will reflect on that ancient thrill of emotional patriotism and compare it to the reality of what our country has become. I will review new options for celebration in an attempt to recover that visceral connection with the flag fluttering in the breeze in those parades of memory, hear again the refrains of the Sousa marches and experience the sure and certain knowledge of the greatness of our country. Oh, how I want those times back. I plan to share those longings with some of our best and bravest at the Southern Oregon-White City Rehabilitation Center and Clinic and maybe, just maybe, those long dormant feelings will return."

As we in Alpine prepare for the Fourth, and look forward to the charming parade in Crown Hills that celebrates our country's independence, let us pause to remember celebrations from years gone by. It is our duty to ensure that our young people feel and live the patriotism we have felt through the years. Would that each of us hears the strains of Sousa's Stars and Stripes Forever this year! While we are getting ready for the celebration, readers may wish to visit the websites below and perhaps join us in reflecting on how to best celebrate the Fourth of July.

Paralyzed Veterans of America [www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org)

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans [www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org)

War Comes Home [www.warcomeshome.org](http://www.warcomeshome.org)

Veterans Helping Veterans [www.honoravet.org](http://www.honoravet.org)

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