

## “WHAT IS AMERICA TO ME”

### “The House I Live In”

The house I live in, a plot of earth, a street.  
 The grocer and the butcher, and the people that I meet;  
 The children in the playground, the faces that I see;  
 All races, all religions, That's America to me.

The place I work in, the worker at my side  
 The little town or city where my people lived and died  
 The “howdy” and the handshake – the air of feeling free  
 The right to speak my mind out, That's America to me.

The things I see about me – the big things and the small  
 The little corner news-stand and the house a mile tall;  
 The wedding and the church-yard, the laughter and the tears  
 The dream that's been a growin' for a hundred fifty years.

The town I live in – the street, the house, the room  
 The pavement of the city, or a garden all in bloom  
 The church, the school, the clubhouse, the million lights I see  
 But especially the people, That's America to me.

*By Lewis Allen*

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The words of old Abe Lincoln, of Jefferson & Paine  
 Of Washington and Jackson, and the tasks that still remain  
 The little bridge at Concord, where Freedom's fight began  
 Our Gettysburg and Midway and the story of Bataan.

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The loved ones we remember, who fought that we might live  
 The nameless unsung heroes, who gave all that one could give.  
 Defenders of our freedom, the women and the men,  
 Who loved the House we live in, but who won't come home again.

During the March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1958, meeting of Chapter CP of P.E.O., we witnessed the installation of our President. The first statement she made after assuming office, struck a vibrant cord within me. These were her words - and I quote, “P.E.O. is the largest secret organization of women in the world and we are little but a part of it.”

This statement set me to thinking of how important we can be if we but try to accomplish the goals set by our predecessors both of P.E.O. and of the forefathers of Democracy.

“The house I live in” – May I treat this not as the brick, the stone, or the frame house, but as the house of clay that our fathers and mothers gave us, furnished with a heart and soul. This is a precious gift. We of P.E.O. are admonished to improve this gift – to seek growth in Charity to others of our sisterhood, our community and our country.

We were given a vast opportunity when we were given the Constitution of the United States. This we will recognize as “The right to speak my mind out.” “That is truly America to me.”

Turn back to America as it was at the time of the Civil War – with two great divisions, the North and the South. At the crucial time an emancipator was given this nation. Where else but America could there ever be found an Abraham Lincoln? Today the word segregation is becoming obsolete – it has a negative meaning in our thoughts and mind. Today we are accepting our colored people as brothers and sisters. “They may be remembered as the folks beyond the railroad,” but they are America to me.”

They are my neighbor white & black  
The people who just came here, or for a generation back.  
The town hall and the soap box, the torch of Liberty  
A home for all God’s children.

Our culture has emanated from every country in the world. America is the melting pot of the world. America has made mistakes, but by the rule of trial and error, it has emerged triumphant. If it is wrong it is up to us as members of the largest secret organization of women in the world to do our share in seeking growth in knowledge, and in culture, and to radiate all light possible by conversation, by writing and by the right exercise of any talent we possess.

May I quote Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he said, “The most we have to fear is fear itself.” Yet we as Christians are promised in the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust.” As we look back through the pages of American history, our great statesmen - Washington, Jefferson, McArthur, and many more of our leaders - have always called for divine guidance to lead this country through crucial moments. We recall President Eisenhower attended church service; then, before taking the oath of office, prayed for divine guidance in the momentous tasks before him as President of these United States.

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The founders of America who came here to worship as their conscience dictated, were stalwart, God-fearing, freedom-loving people, but not afraid of work and rebuffs. These are the Christian pioneers of America.

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 The nameless unsung heroes who gave all that one could give  
 Defenders of our freedom - the women and the men  
 Who loved the house we live in, but won't come home again.

“There is work for all to do,” may be but a quotation, but to P.E.O. members, it should be a startling challenge. We are all called upon to fulfill obligations of home, church and organizations. This year and following years it is important that we take our obligations seriously and that we diligently pursue our tasks and appreciate the “air of feeling free.”

We are not all gifted or talented in the same way, but what is more important we are all able to help some one less fortunate than ourselves, if only saying a kind word or helping with a task. Sharing is a meaningful word – and to all of us has been given the ability and the materials to share. So – this is truly “a land of wealth and beauty with enough for all to share, and is within reach of all.”

Where but in America could be found “the church of the open door” as was described in a recent issue of a current magazine. The open door beckons to all. The open church stands waiting 24 hours a day to give comfort to the weary, the sick, the lonely and the homeless. The door opens out. So might it be said of each of us that we keep our heart with its doors opening out to all who pass our way. An open door and no man can shut it.

“The task that still remains” – Our task may be large or it may be small – according to the Divine plan. Little do we know what trials may await us in the journey of life, but our Heavenly Father has promised to strengthen and uphold us by the right hand of His power.

To us of the P.E.O. sisterhood who have ideals and the highest standards, may I summarize my theme – “What America means to me” by saying –

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 The pavement of the city, or a garden all in bloom  
 The church, the school, the clubhouse, the million lights I see  
 But especially the people, that's America to me.

By Mary Lincke, Chapter CP  
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