

Fox News Channel. Indeed, the opinion piece was approved for publication in *The Buzz* by the principal and the journalism faculty adviser.

But the school changed its tune when Smith's editorial drew more jeers than cheers, not from students but from outside adult activists. The day after the piece ran, a group of these activists showed up on campus and called on students to leave class and protest Smith's message. Instead of defending a student's exercise of free speech, school officials responded by turning on him. They confiscated the remaining issues of the paper, sent a letter to parents denouncing the article, and organized public meetings at which Smith was demeaned and derided. Meanwhile, taunts and threats greeted him outside of school. He saw a side of Marin County very different from its image as a Mecca for open-minds.

To be sure, a public school isn't a forum for unrestricted speech. School officials have a duty to bar behavior and messages that by their nature threaten to

incite violence. But Smith's opinion pieces didn't come near that line. He sought to contribute to rational dialogue — a fact that school officials recognized by their initial green light for his immigration editorial. That the green light gave way to flashing alarms said less about what he wrote than about the administrators' softening backbones. They let bullying opponents of his message divert them from their duty to foster an open and civil educational environment.

Smith has been out of school (and in the Marines) for two years, but he thinks his lawsuit is too important to let drop. A mediation before a former California appeal court judge is scheduled for October. Smith still seeks a clear judicial declaration that his rights were violated when the rule of the mob was allowed to supplant the rule of the First Amendment. If he gets his way, the administrators who gave him a tutorial in intolerance will receive a schooling in the importance of free thought and free speech. CFR

ON CAMPUS

Stand a little less between us and the Sun

If academia has its way, the next American generation not only won't experience freedom directly, it won't even learn about it conceptually.

M I C H A E L P . D A V I D S O N

I OFTEN WONDER if other political junkies, like me, or even just normal people who pay little attention to politics, have known a moment when they really *experienced* freedom. I don't mean understanding it conceptually or learning the history of our country and its foundations in liberty. I mean an experience of freedom while you are in fact free, something of the experience of people who flee oppression to come here. I'm talking, I guess, about an experience like appreciating the light of a flashlight in broad daylight ... but humor me.

Such an experience would be something recalled

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fondly, as profoundly moving and inspirational — the way one remembers their first love, first Communion (for us Catholics), first religious experience, first drive after one earns a driver's license, first day of college, senior prom, wedding, or first born child. After all, freedom is the source and the guarantor of those milestones.

My experience came when I was pretty young. Several years ago, I competed intensely in both wrestling and judo — until I injured my back. This activity brought me an opportunity to train and compete in the former Soviet Union and other countries of the former Soviet Bloc. Early on each trip, I grew homesick, missing the food, weather, and more comfortable living arrangements the USA provides. But during one of my trips, I was strick-

en with the most profound homesickness.

Part of the arrangement with our competitors was that the athletes trade “warm-ups” — uniform clothing worn while preparing for competition. I was given the Russian warm-up as a gift, and I gave one of the Russian competitors my USA warm-ups. I decided to put his on and, accompanied by my translator, walk around town to blend in. In Red Square, a military officer approached us. I don’t speak or understand Russian, but it sounded to me like he said “American.”

THE TRANSLATOR informed me that the soldier wanted to know if I’m an American, which surprised me. I thought I was incognito. The translator relayed my confusion and turned back to me: “Americans are often told this. He said he could tell you’re an American because you walk like you’re free.”

Americans walk like they’re free. I never forgot it.

Since then, I’ve never wavered in loving my country. In fact, I think that one freedom experience in my youth inoculated me from the many attempts at brainwashing at the University of California, Berkeley, where I attended school.

At a young age, I was fortunate enough to be shown the real meaning of the phrase: Land of the Free. Ronald Reagan captured it in his January 11, 1989, Farewell Address:

I’ve been reflecting on what the past eight years have meant and mean. And the image that comes to mind like a refrain is a nautical one — a small story about a big ship, and a refugee and a sailor ... the sailor, like most American servicemen, was young, smart, and fiercely observant. The crew spied on the horizon a leaky little boat. And crammed inside were refugees from Indochina hoping to get to America. The Midway sent a small launch to bring them to the ship and safety. As the refugees made their way through the choppy seas, one spied the sailor on deck and stood up and called out to him. He yelled, “Hello, American sailor. Hello, freedom man.”

A small moment with a big meaning, a moment the sailor, who wrote it in a letter, couldn’t get out of his mind. And when I saw it, neither could I. Because that’s what it was to be an American in the 1980s. We stood, again, for freedom. I know we always have, but in the past few years the world again, and in a way, we ourselves rediscovered it.

Imagine what it would be like to be told you walk like you’re free, or to be called Freedom Man by one who has never experienced freedom. We do not

Kerry’s Horse

From out the presidential bickering
Comes word: America’s light is flickering
And things look mighty grim. All this we know
Because John Edwards tells us that it’s so.
When John was growing up America’s light
Across the world was shining very bright
Forget John Kerry’s war in Vietnam
Forget the cold war, the Watergate scam,
Forget the Bay of Pigs, the Berlin Wall,
John Kennedy’s assassination. All
These events to Edwards grow pale today
Beside the failures of George Bush’s stay.
The light in Reagan’s city on a hill,
Freedom’s symbol to many nation’s still,
That shone so brightly, now in Edward’s view
Grows dim. Alas! Alack! What’s there to do?
Edwards’ advice: “We must not stay the course.
Our only hope is switch to Kerry’s horse.”
Still, one must wonder at the message Kerry sends
When voters see he lights his candles at both ends.

— by Joy Skilmer*

usually *experience* freedom *per se*; rather, we learn about it. We are taught what it means to be an American, taught the ideals of the Founding Fathers manifested in the constitutional principles of freedom and liberty. Even then, it seems Americans learn this only as young children. When they grow old enough actually to be able to develop a political philosophy, nothing of the sort is taught. On most college campuses, young Americans are taught by some that the Land of the Free is some distant or delusional utopia that was never realized; we’re the land of the oppressed, greedy, and imperialistic. We essentially learn that there is no powerful virtue but mostly vice in American ideals. The American Dream is a nightmare.

* *The political verse of Joy Skilmer, né Lyn Nofziger, is available at both Barnes and Noble.com and Amazon.com and from MND Publishing, 573 Marina Rd., Deatsville, AL 36022. Keep up with Lyn’s “musings” at: www.lynnofziger.com*