

The Question by Cam Giangrande

The school bell rings: a young boy stands and puts his hand over his heart to recite The National Anthem. “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all”.

As he gets older, the importance of those words take hold; especially those last few words: “with liberty and justice for all”, and he’s filled with pride. Yet, within the same walls of the school where he speaks those words, he begins to learn some unsavory and downright evil things about this country...his country.

He learns about slavery and the civil war. He learns about Japanese interment during World War II. He learns about fire hoses and police dogs attacking young blacks in the streets, for no other reason than the color of their skin. He learns of secret tests on unsuspecting Americans, approved by members of his government. He learns of propping up foreign governments, and toppling regimes. He learns about adding poison to alcohol during prohibition. He learns that the escalation of the Vietnam War was built on a lie. He learns that we aren’t always “the good guys”, and that the world isn’t always black and white, but sometimes, more often than not, it’s filled with multiple shades of gray.

The boy feels dissolution and despair. How can this be, he thinks? Days become weeks, and weeks become months, and months become years. The boy continues to grow into a young man, and he continues to say The National Anthem, but for years now; they haven’t meant anything to him. He sees terrible things on television daily, and he questions his government. The political parties are irrelevant to him; he sees them as two sides of the same coin. One Party lied about Vietnam, one Party lied about Iraq.

But this is a good and thoughtful young man; he wants to believe in something. Everything was easier when he was young. He has caring and loving parents, but their words ring hollow, and don’t give comfort. One day he saw an old woman pushing a man in a wheel chair. The man was wearing a bomber jacket with patches on it. He wore a baseball cap which read, “World War II Veteran”. He was about 85 years old. For some reason he felt compelled to stop and talk with the man.

“Can I ask you a question sir?”

“Absolutely young man, what is it?”

“Do you STILL love this country?”

“Of course I do, UNCONDITIONALLY.”

“But how can you, with all the bad things we’ve sometimes done.”

“Son, I may not always like my country, but I’ll never stop loving her. Because this country isn’t the people, who are sometimes flawed, but the idea of what America is supposed to be, and what She always aspires to be.”

“Thank you sir.”

“You’re welcome son.”

From that moment on he realized what Unconditional Love is.