

Memorial Day, Ames, Iowa, May 30, 2016
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On behalf of the Mayor and the City Council, I want to provide my welcome to all of you to this ceremony remembering those who have served in defense of our country and its ideals. This is the 130th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. She stands on Ellis Island in front of the building through which millions first touched American soil. On her pedestal are the words of Emma Lazarus

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" ~~cries she~~
~~With silent lips.~~ "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

In 1950, a refugee from Yugoslavia came through Ellis Island. He had grown up in Yugoslavia, fled his home country at 19 when the Communists began weeding out potential threats, and found refuge in America. He took a job as a janitor in a hospital in Butte Montana. To learn English, he hung around the terminal ward because the patients liked the company and because they couldn't leave, even if they wanted. Six months later, he became the first person drafted into the Korean War from Silver Bow County Montana. On the same day he received the letter from President Truman, he received a letter admitting him to Harvard. He went to the draft board and asked if he was obligated to serve.

"Are you a citizen?"

"No."

"Then you are not obligated to serve. But do you want to become a citizen?"

"Oh yes!"

"Well you would have a great case if you have already served in the U.S. military."

And so he became a private in the U.S. Army.

At Fort Bragg, he woke up early every day to serve as altar boy for the Chaplain. On the day before he was to ship to Korea, the chaplain went to the base commander and said that there was a guy who spoke 6 languages and should be in military intelligence. Latin was one of the languages. English was not. Nevertheless, he got assigned to Fort Riley where he was to interrogate any prisoners that might show up from the Holy Roman Empire. None did, and so he

had time on his hands. A bunkmate was also from Yugoslavia. His wife had a best friend that was serving as a nanny in Salina Kansas. By 1952, he had an honorable discharge, citizenship, a wife, and admission to Iowa State where he studied economics under the GI Bill.

My father always said the best decision he ever made in his life was to turn down Harvard in favor of the U.S. Army. He left Ames with a PhD, taught at Kansas State, raised 5 kids, and lived the American Dream.

There is now a country called Slovenia where my parents were born. If you go there today, you will see hundreds of little rural villages, each with its own little cemetery. In every cemetery there is a board with the names of people who disappeared during World War II, names that were not allowed to be acknowledged in public, names that were written on the back of faded black and white photos hidden at the bottom of drawers, names that would have been forgotten had the Soviet Union lasted a generation longer. When I go there, it always amazes me how many Orazems there were once.

In a cemetery in Manhattan Kansas, there is one stone with the name Orazem. My dad was very proud of the plot. For the last 10 years of his life, he would take me there to show off his future location. "We are right next to the Dean of Agriculture!" he would say proudly. "And only 3 places away from the basketball coach Jack Hartman!" My father is the only person I have met who viewed death as a way to move to a nicer neighborhood.

Today, my father's funeral flag is flying in that cemetery. My brother and sister will be decorating the grave with red carnations, Slovenia's flower. There will be a vase on either side of the stone. On the front of the stone are the names 'Frank' and 'Slava'. On the back, there is an inscription: "Slovenian by birth, Kansan by choice."

And on Ellis Island, Lady Liberty is still holding out her lamp after 130 years, welcoming the next refugees from ancient lands from which they have been tossed and who are desperately seeking a land where they can breathe free.