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How Long Does It Take To Become an American?

Patricia Anderson of 25380 Evergreen, Southfield, has won a top award from the Freedom Foundation for her essay on "How Long Does It Take to Become an American?" She has made a tape recording of a condensed reading of it for the "Freedom Singers" broadcast Sept. 22 on the ABC network. It will be carried in this area by WXYZ. The essay is reprinted here in its entirety.

By PATRICIA ANDERSON

How long does it take to become an American? This question has arisen in my mind frequently of late, and I look at my fellow-workers, my friends and acquaintances, and I find myself searching for, and recognizing the ingredients that go to make up an American.

There is a family I know who have all the attributes. Their family heritage, which is an impressive one, is not, they feel, something to be proud of, but something to live up to. They have never let outward changes in their lives affect their deep regard for each other's welfare and the welfare of their country, nor their responsibility to the community. They have been good Americans from way back.

THEN, THERE is a young housewife who came here from Hungary just a few years ago. She doesn't speak of the years in a concentration camp, but of her job teaching second graders in an Oak Park school, of her children and her husband's future. Her enthusiasm and willingness to learn have made her a respected citizen and a real champion of the American ideal. She and her husband care what happens here, and they are passing that caring on to their children.

A young girl is interviewed for her first job. She, along with other applicants, is asked if she knows what the difference between the Department of State and the Department of Defense. She not only knows, but also cares about these things and is anxious to put her knowledge to some use as a responsible person and citizen.

I FIND THAT in any phase of

learning, there are three steps one must take. They are recognition, realization, and manifestation. First, one must recognize the need. Next comes the realization that the knowledge, the will, is there to be used to fill that need. Then, whatever result one is after has to be manifested. One must actively manifest responsibility in his everyday life.

I think it is necessary for us to go through these three stages. Some go through them more quickly than others, depending on circumstances and the person.

HOW LONG did it take me to become an American? I could give an answer such as, "I received my citizenship papers in 1940," or "My son is in the service of the United States government." Still, these things do not make me an American. Neither does the fact that I cast a vote on election days or attend church. As good as these outward symbols of good citizenship are, they do not necessarily make one a good American.

I came to this country in 1928. Those first few years I tried to become a good citizen. I lived in America, yes, but I had not realized my full status as an American. My early years in another country did not seem compatible to the stimuli of a city like Detroit in the twenties and thirties.

I READ Bromfield and Sinclair Lewis to try to capture the real America. I listened to the music of Gertrude and Stephen Foster and understood something of the spirit of America. As my son studied American history in school I, too, in helping him with his homework, learned something of America's past.

I applied for my citizenship papers and when the great day came I took my witnesses to court and received my precious document. I found that a piece of paper does not make one a citizen, except in a legal sense, but it had its significance. I was surprised one day when tears came to my eyes on seeing the Stars and Stripes flying in the breeze at a flag-raising ceremony. All of a sudden it meant something—something that not only raised my eyes but my spirit. It was my flag.

HOW LONG does it take to become an American? One has to feel in order to be a real citizen;

one has to care; to be willing to become involved; to feel responsible for one's fellow Americans; to stand up at a meeting and say what one thinks; to vote; to ask God's guidance, in hours of trouble.

We must give our children the benefits of an American education in the true sense, the tools of learning based on the ideals of our forefathers. We must teach them to estimate the dignity of manhood and womanhood and the significance of living under the American flag.

WE CAN say, "Yes, that's true, but the world is changing so fast. The standards early America lived by have changed. We are now asked to send our money and our loved ones to far-off places we never heard of before. And what about the space age and the possibility of future Americans living on other planets? What good are Thomas Jefferson and William Jennings Bryan to us then?"

The answer is in decisions. We will need, and do need to educate our people to make decisions, for our future and the future of the world depend on our making the right decisions. Our children are growing up into a world of decisions.

WE ARE not a nation of sheep. It is time we realized that we have everything we need in this great country of ours to bring forth these decision-makers. The Americans of the past were makers of decisions. There are men and women living now whose names will go down in history along with Lincoln and other great Americans.

We do not need to throw out part of our basic doctrine or our educational system and form others. We need only to dig a little deeper, to study a little harder, to find out a little more about our courageous decision-makers of the past. They were courageous and they have handed down that courage for us to use now.

AMERICANS, OF all people, can make courageous decisions, positive decisions, because of their broader outlook. This country has a heritage of largeness of spirit and accomplishment. Who but an American could visualize and build great railroads and bridges that span a continent? Who but

Historical Group Will Meet for Annual Meeting

The Historical Society of Michigan will hold its 83rd annual meeting in Grand Rapids Sept. 20-21. Historical papers, a presentation of awards of merit, a panel discussion and a historical tour will highlight the two-day meeting.

Registration for the meeting will begin Sept. 20. The keynote session will be "The Future of Michigan History" and will feature panelists Willard Wichers, Holland, president of the Michigan Historical Commission; William Alderfer, director, Michigan Historical Society; Frank Woodward, Detroit author; Dominic Paris, Livonia Historical Society; and Charles Orlebeke, aide to the governor on higher education.

THE MODERATOR will be Roscoe Bonstedt, Ann Arbor, past president of the Historical Society of Michigan and former trustee of Wayne State University and the University of Michigan.

Other sessions at the meeting will include a paper on the history of the Michigan cholera epidemic and an excursion into the gaslight era of Grand Rapids at the turn of the century. A guided bus tour will visit the site of recent archeological discoveries in Grand Rapids where evidence of the ancient Hopewell Indian culture have been discovered.

The society's annual Burton Lecture will be held Friday night and have as its speaker Clifford L. Lord, dean of general studies at Columbia University, New York City, a past president of the American Association for State and Local History and a former director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

an American can grasp and fully realize the potential of the near future? We are living not only in a world of change but of decisions.

How long does it take to become an American? The time it takes to be a maker of decisions based on the American way of life—its ideals, its opportunities, its responsibilities, its duty to God.

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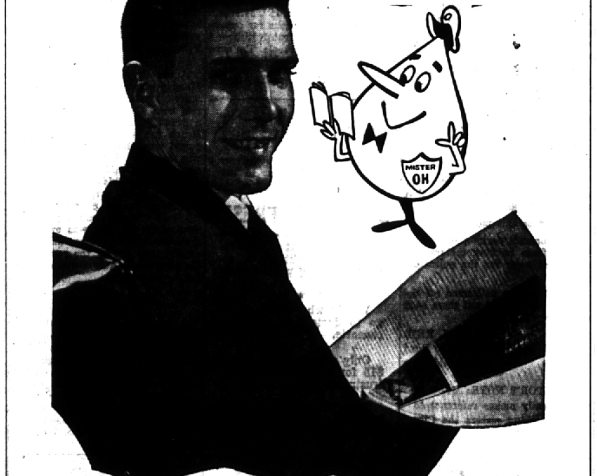
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