

Freedom means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. My freedom is something I consider quite exceptional. It has showered me with knowledge of other countries and cultures and their belief systems concerning freedom. Knowing what I know about other peoples' freedoms or lack thereof makes me appreciate my experiences that much more. I celebrate individuality with enthusiasm and am eager to hear the ideas of others. My life here has afforded me the opportunity to decide for myself about much of what goes on in my life and that is nothing less than a blessing.

I am fortunate to be an American. Adding to that benefit, I was born and raised in Southern California. This has given me the benefit of a deeper understanding of acceptance and tolerance. People here tend to be more open to differences among people, especially in contrast to other states and countries where things like segregation and conformity are still practiced and even celebrated to a level of harsh extremism.

My freedom is something I am thankful for everyday. I have my own thoughts and opinions and share them openly with many people from different walks of life without fear of judgment or retribution. Existing in such an open culture has allowed me to be myself and follow any path I want or to go where there is no path and blaze a trail all my own. Had I grown up in Argentina where my mother was born I would have been expected to wear dresses everyday,

Speak quietly and always with restraint and probably to marry young and have a large family. The idea being that only a man can fully round out my life.

Had I been born in Afghanistan like my uncle, I doubt I would have been allowed, let alone empowered to speak my mind, or voice my thoughts as readily as I do, (a point my uncle has brought to my attention on several occasions). Even in this day and age in his mind a woman's place is behind or beneath a man. In short, I am blessed to be me, living in this time and in this place. If I were anywhere else I am not sure I would be the same person. After all, it was not so long ago that women in America were without the basic freedoms that many of us take for granted today.

It wasn't until 1920, after years of suffrage that women in America won the right to vote. Even after attaining that milestone in our history we were still limited in our life choices. We were expected to stay home, have children, always look "presentable" and wait for our husbands (the breadwinners) to provide us with our every need. Jobs that were available were limited to things like elementary school teachers and secretaries. We were second hand citizens. Walking around in pants and sneakers without make-up would have been unacceptable (lucky for me, times have changed).

Today I have the freedom to pursue my dreams whatever they may be. There are power house women from every walk of life for young people to look up to. A woman like me in the 1920's would have likely been shunned from society for my thoughts and opinions and my boldness in the expression thereof. Contrarily, strong independent women in this day and age are often celebrated.

The freedoms I have at my disposal allow me to stand up boldly and say I am an American woman in the year 2011 and YES I am 26 years old and not married, YES I have piercings and tattoos, YES I ride motorcycles, YES I am an exotic animal trainer and YES I am proud of who I am. To those of you don't agree with my life choices, my freedoms entitle me to say, your approval is neither desired nor required. I will, however, take your acceptance.