

# Ninnescah Valley News

April 25, 2008

## **Biting at the Leash: A Struggle for Freedom**

*By Sarah McIntosh*

My six-month-old dog Franny loves going outside. Rain or snow it doesn't matter she begs to go out. When she has the opportunity to explore and run free she is happy as can be. But, whenever I put her on a leash to go outside she isn't quite so happy. One of two things happens. Either she tugs as hard as she can, trying to bite off the leash or she sits and stares up at me with a look saying, how can you do this to me? The thing is I can't really blame her; I love my freedom too.

We often get caught up in patriotism especially around Independence Day and Memorial Day. Sometimes we even refer loosely or in passing to the elusive terms of freedom and liberty. But we should all take pause, no matter what time of year, and consider what freedom and liberty means to us, and why we care about it.

Most of us know something about the founding of the country. The Founding Fathers came from England, some under persecution for religious practices, others looking for a better life; all looking to start a country where they retained freedom and liberty under the law.

The laws of the land look considerably different than they did 200 years ago. We have volume upon volumes of codes and regulations. Each level of government has grown larger over the years.

Sadly, the truth is that we give up freedoms nearly every day. Each time a law is passed, whether at the municipal, state, or federal level, we lose a little bit---and sometimes a lot---of freedom. That's not to say that every law is bad, there are a few that actually preserve freedoms and some that are necessary to maintain a safe and secure community. But those are the exceptions, not the rule.

Most of us are lucky. We lead such comfortable lives that we rarely worry about how laws affect us. When there is plenty to eat, comfortable housing, and American Idol, who has time to worry about what happens in Topeka, or in Washington?

The problem with this is we are relinquishing our responsibility. In a representative democracy, we, the people, are supposed to hold our government accountable. We should be vigilant about observing what is taking place. For, once we lose a freedom, it is next to impossible to get it back. Government grows, that's its nature. Laws grow more and more complex. And often, government lacks transparency. So, it's up to the people to make sure that what is taking place is in our best interest.

When determining what laws we agree with and which we do not, we should all consider the consequences not just to us but also to others in our communities and country. Every time a freedom is taken away from someone else, it chips away at the barriers protecting our own rights. And, if we aren't all vigilant about protecting everyone's rights, there may not be anyone left to speak up for you when the law personally affects your rights. So it's up to each of us to pay attention to what is happening and respond when we are unhappy with the outcomes.

Unfortunately for Franny, she will just have to put up with being on a leash. And perhaps in any society we are all on a leash. The question is, how short are we willing to let that leash become?

*Sarah McIntosh is Vice President of Programs for the Kansas-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy. A complete bio on Ms. McIntosh can be found at <http://www.flinthills.org/content/view/24/39/>, and she can be reached at [sarah.mcintosh@flinthills.org](mailto:sarah.mcintosh@flinthills.org). To learn more about the Flint Hills Center, please visit [www.flinthills.org](http://www.flinthills.org).*