

Bloomin' in America
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My youngest daughter, Shayna, graduated from high school last week. Emotional enough as an event, even more imposing is the fact that she's leaving next week for Los Angeles to start her career as a filmmaker. (I'm sure she doesn't see it that way, but I do.) I think we're both still in shock over it.

I don't claim to be a movie reviewer. I just love movies. All nationalities. All genres. All. (Even the bad ones.) So, of course, it's not a big surprise that this rubbed off on my offspring. Her first movie was *E.T.* (she was 3). Her last (last week) was the *X-Files*. The wonder has never worn off her face.

In the 1993 poem, "Sun of *Jiyu* Over a New Land," which I recently reread, I was struck by the phrase "In America, new winds blow from the west." In the very next stanza, SGI President Ikeda says of Hollywood that it's the deliverer of "bountiful gifts of romance and dreams to the world." Influenced by a certain negativity in some elements of our culture, I always hid my feelings about Hollywood. It was President Ikeda who helped me understand that my deep love of movies and moviemaking was a positive thing, even a good thing.

This leads me to the point of why I'm writing this. Talkin' about dreams. For several months, I've been mesmerized by a book called *Anthem: An American Road Story*, written by two young women who crisscrossed the country to film their own movie. I missed the movie when it came to town last summer. But, luckily, they wrote a book about it. They chased down people like James Redfield of *Celestine Prophecy* fame, Ben & Jerry of ice cream fame, Studs Turkel, Hunter S. Thompson, George McGovern and others, famous and non, just to ask them, "Is there hope for the American Dream?" That's all they wanted to know. But the one they wanted most to ask and the one they chased the hardest was their hero (they called him the Holy Grail), Robert Redford. They said he was the person responsible for them believing they could make a film at all.

They chased him for a year and when finally they succeeded, right at the point they'd given up, they asked, "Is there something specifically you value most about being an American — anything that sets us apart or makes us unique?"

His face changed completely at that moment — it became very soft. And he said: "I sure do. I do. I'm extremely patriotic, I really am, but on a very, very deep, almost spiritual level. This is the best country to be in.... I still say there's no greater place physically. And the fact is we still can...boast the one ingredient that would make me say always this is the best place to be — and why I like to be here — and that's freedom."

When Mr. Zaitzu wrote his booklet on the poem "Sun of *Jiyu*" in 1993, he said, "I have been pondering why President Ikeda likes the United States so much." He concluded it's because President Ikeda feels "it's in America that Buddhism will really bloom."

How is Buddhism going to bloom in America? It's a question been on my mind (I'm-sure-I'm-not-the-only-one-who's-asking) for a long, long time. Those two who made the movie and wrote the book *Anthem* didn't make it because they were rich or even to become rich. They made it out of a passionate desire to express something deep and rich about America to their own generation, and it breaks your heart — their purity of intent.

"We grew tired of the broadcast version of this country," they said. "We were not convinced that ours is a time defined only by political apathy, declining opportunities, and the general malaise that has become synonymous with our generation — a generation identified only by a letter, nondescript and clandestine." The same generation my daughters

are part of.

We're the Boomers. They're the Bloomers.

My youngest has this dream of making a movie about the hero she found in American lore, Jack Kerouac. Two years ago we made a pilgrimage to City Lights bookstore in San Francisco. Only 16 years old at the time, she was shaking as we approached it. I still cry when I think about it.

A year ago a group of us climbed to Desolation Peak in the North Cascades, where Kerouac once spent the summer. My daughter alone made it to the top. (All I can do is take her there. She's the one gonna make it.) She's got something so deep in her heart. I think it's called the American dream. When the *Anthem* duo interviewed author, poet and NPR commentator Andrei Codrescu, he said, "[T]he future of the American experiment is the future of the world.... The millennium will happen as a result of where we go from here — this place. That's just a fact."

Here's to you, Shayna, Millennium Girl!

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