

## Just Plain Tired of Being Pushed Around

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On Thursday evening, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks took a seat in the "colored" section of the green-and-white Cleveland Avenue bus that would take her home. A quarter moon was rising and there was a slight chill in the air as the Montgomery, Alabama, bus began to fill with other folks - white and black - each making their way home.

When the bus stopped at Court Square -- a place where African-Americans had been sold to the highest bidder less than 100 years earlier -- a white man boarded the bus, and there were no seats remaining.

As was the law and the custom in the deep South, the driver - one James F. Blake -- ordered Mrs. Parks and three other African-Americans to give up their seats in the foremost row of the back section of the bus so the white man could be seated. Three got up, as they had done many times before, and stood in the **aisle in the back of the bus**. Rosa Parks did not move.

She was dog-tired after another long day of stitching and ironing shirts at the Montgomery Fair department store. Her feet hurt and her hands ached - and, on that particular night, she just decided that she'd had enough. If they wanted her seat, they'd have to take it, because she was staying put.

Was it some great, conscious act of defiance that kept Rosa Parks in her seat? No, she said it wasn't. Sure, she knew the law was wrong and unfair and demeaning, but that wasn't what drove her to civil disobedience.

"Well," explained Rosa Parks, "I was just plain tired of being pushed around."

It could have been a December evening like countless others. Yet, once too often Rosa Parks was told to stand in the back of the bus. All of the indignities she had suffered personally and vicariously seemed to well up from the very pit of her stomach. All of the evil that had been thrust upon her people; all of those times she had bit her tongue when justice demanded that she speak -- all of that and more was quietly reflected in one simple phrase: "No. I'm not moving."

One simple act of defiance, one silent vow to see it through to the end and one heartfelt belief that good must triumph over evil ended segregation in America. Rosa Parks was just tired of being pushed around. She was weary and she was angry. And she wasn't going to take it anymore.

As I thought about Rosa Parks - one tired person who mustered the gumption to defy a nation - I wondered if I had it in me to get really tired - I mean really bone-weary, heart-pounding, ticked-off tired.

Tired of being described as "sincere, but misguided." Tired of being lied to and snickered at by

people in high places. Tired of having to explain over and over again something that should need no explanation.

Yes, as I thought about Rosa Parks, who was "just plain tired of being pushed around," I wondered when each of us would reach that same point that point where we're personally willing to lay it all on the line, one last time, come what may, "I'm going to win or I'm going to die trying."

It's tough. It's hard to rise up again when you've been knocked down. It hurts to reach in and rip out the courage to press on when victory has eluded you time and time again, and disappointment is your constant companion.

Yet, that is the price of victory.

As Emerson once observed: "God does not have his work made manifest by cowards." It does take courage to press on. And I hope the fact that you're reading this is solid evidence that you haven't lost the heart for the fight or faith in our inevitable victory.

Frankly, I am tired of being pushed around and I'm tired of losing and I'm tired of coming just so close, but not being quite there.

If you watched the debate on March 28th and 29th, you may have observed that our side made honorable arguments, well founded in truth. Yet they were not able to carry the day in the face of parliamentary wrangling, grandstanding, and outright distortion of historical fact.

But, as any student of history could tell you, our forefathers would not have been shocked by such chicanery. A contemporary author at the time, who called himself a "Federal Farmer" wrote:

"When power is once transferred from the many to the few, all changes to the Constitution become extremely difficult; the government in this case being beneficial to the few, they will be exceedingly artful and adroit in preventing any measures which may lead to a change; and nothing will produce it but great exertions and severe struggles on the part of the common people."

If our 11-year quest to restore protection to our flag has taught us nothing else, it has proved the wisdom of those words. But we must remember that our nation was built on "great exertions and severe struggles on the part of the common people."

It was begun by Minutemen at Lexington, tested by brothers at Gettysburg, preserved by heroes at Normandy, and made more perfect by the Rosa Parkses of the world who would not budge in the face of evil, and risked their personal everythings so good would triumph.

There are many reasons for us to continue this campaign, and no one expresses them more eloquently than General Brady.

"Many have died for the country they served," he said. "But how many - if they could - would give their lives again for the country we are becoming?"

"I often wonder what those patriots would think if they could come back to the America they saved and watch our TV and our movies, or sit in our classrooms, or read our newspapers.

"That would be tough, but there is one thing I think would hurt them the most: To see that it is legal to desecrate the flag for which they fought, the flag that embraced their coffin and the flag that was the tissue for the tears of those who loved them.

"They would be horrified to hear the legal elite in this country say that our veterans died on the battlefields of the world so that their flag could be burned on the street corners of America."

He goes on to say that we permit our flag to be desecrated and then we are amazed that so few want to serve in the Armed Forces that we allow our nation's honor to be trashed and we are surprised that we have traitors in our midst, that we allow the symbol of all that is good and pure about our country to be defiled and then we are shocked that so many of our leaders are devoid of the values we cherish.

And then General Brady rightly observes that the highest form of patriotism is service to our children.

"We need to raise children with values," he says. "And if we do that, we will preserve that for which America's patriots gave their lives."

That's why we keep fighting.

We must restore our flag to its rightful place under the law so that our children and our grandchildren will never be confused about its meaning, its value, or the price paid to preserve it.

So it becomes apparent that it's no small or unimportant thing we are trying to do. Our success or our failure & will be felt for years to come. A great writer once wrote: "You cannot truly love a thing without wanting to fight for it." And I know that's why you continue to be interested in this campaign, because you do love Old Glory and you are willing to fight for it.

But are we willing to move outside of our comfort zone, are we willing to forget the past and try things we've never tried before, are we willing to speak out anywhere and everywhere to forward the cause and are we willing to become fanatics about protecting the flag?

Are we able to bear just one more time being called "sincere but misguided"? Do we have skin thick enough to be looked down upon by the lawyers, academicians, media and others because we continue to believe that good is not relative and that there is a universal right and wrong?

We must be strong because the day we stop speaking out about things that matter is the day we stop being worthy of the blood that has been shed on our behalf.

The window for victory is growing smaller and now is the appointed time for each of us to do whatever can be done. None of us can do it all & but each of us can do something and all of us have to be willing to do more.

The values we believe in and were taught at our mother's knee & are being wrested from us at every turn. Protecting our flag will not restore them. But it is a start.

It was once written that America is a great nation because it is a good nation. We have a long way to go to restore our foundation of "goodness," and protecting our flag would be a step in the right direction.