

# The Patriot

By Stephen J. Cramer

The car overtook me quite quickly from behind, and I continued glancing uneasily into my rear-view mirror, wondering about the urgency of the driver. From my view I could only discern that it was a very new looking, dark-colored sedan. Then I saw the flag mounted to the rear side window, and considered the importance of the driver's errand. Was I interfering with a Senator's or Congressman's business as I sauntered along the road at my leisurely pace? Perhaps it was a Diplomat on an errand of mercy, trying to prevent a battle, or War. My eyes continued furtive glances into the mirror. I could not see the colors of the flag, even though the car was directly behind my own now. Without thinking, my speed had increased—the urgency of my own travel now filled with more purpose than before.

As we approached a traffic stop, the flag fell limp, revealing some red and white coloring, and I considered that it could be a Red Cross flag. The driver's errand might be more important than I had thought—was he carrying a precious cargo of life itself for some waiting patient? The light changed and I considered moving to the side to allow him to pass, but noticed that the road was about to increase to two lanes, so I remained on course. Sure enough, as our lanes divided the car left its tandem position, quickly passed beside me, and continued ahead.

As it passed, I was able to carefully examine the flag in all its splendor—the red, white, and blue of our American Flag. It was quite torn and discolored, and was mounted in a small, white plastic window clip—remnant from September 11<sup>th</sup> patriotism. I immediately looked at the seat beside me and saw my own flag mixed with some papers and a broken ice-scraper. My seven-year old daughter had asked for the flag's removal from its lofty perch on the antenna of my car, as its display had become an unsettling reminder that things were no longer the same. No amount of patriotic fervor could convince her that we could both rebuild our nation and proudly fly our colors. She knew that we would not return to normal until everything did. So my flag, stripped of proud glory, now faded and torn, awaited a proper disposal.

I realized, then, that so many things had returned to normal. Where once a driven landscape of patriotism covered our roads, now I found a single flag on a swift moving car to be worthy of my careful scrutiny. Store windows displayed sale flyers

instead of bunting. Parking spaces were once again coveted instead of being easily shared.

But pride in our country was still present, just slightly obscured—waiting for another tragedy, or War, or other threat to the freedoms we hold so dear to resurface.

In some ways we had changed for the better, in other ways we had not changed at all.

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