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We all should have an American bucket list

By Ron Kitchens
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Maybe it is the election or the financial crises or middle age or maybe just being the father of an amazing teenager ..., but whatever the reason, I have been thinking a lot lately about what it means to be an American.

I was lucky enough this past week to attend the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, Calif. This was one of the things on my "bucket list" of things to do in my life. Since I was a child, I have been fascinated with the flower-covered floats and the glamour of the parade. It truly is one of the great things about America.

While I was in my hotel room doing what all men do while they wait on their wife, I was channel surfing and what should be playing but "The Bucket List." The premise of the movie is that these two men set out to tackle a list of things to do before they die.

As I watched the movie it dawned on me that each of us ought to have a real American bucket list. This list would not be just the things to do in America, but the things we must pass on to our children to ensure the best of our country is not lost.

So here is my start:

Attend a citizenship ceremony. There is nothing more American and few things more inspirational than witnessing people who are living the American dream and becoming Americans right before your eyes. I have attended two of these ceremonies and cried with pride that I had the good fortune to be born an American.

Read the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty while standing on Liberty Island. It is difficult to read the words of Emma Lazarus and not feel a great responsibility as an American: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" This is truly the mission statement for our nation.

Go to any national cemetery and witness the memorial to those who died to ensure your freedom. Then buy a meal for the next military person you see.

Sing the national anthem at an event while standing on foreign soil. Get ready for goose bumps.

Visit the Concord Bridge in Massachusetts and the Alamo in Texas. Two revolutionary wars formed the United States. Celebrate the heroes that chose to throw off the shackles of oppression and create a country.

Drive an American-made car, not an American-brand car. Drive one that actually is built here. You not only will be helping provide your neighbor with a job but getting a great, well-designed product. Without a strong business community, we will never see the creation of wealth and jobs that is required to keep our nation the world's economic beacon.

Visit the homes of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Sam Houston. These men put their wealth, position and lives on the line to overthrow their own government for social and economic freedom for their generation and all generations to come.

View the Constitution and Bill of Rights at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. Democracies all over the world have been based on these two works.

Walk around a college campus and see for yourself how amazing these kids are of all faiths, creeds and colors. In most places in the world, college is still reserved for the wealthy -- not so in America. Anyone with drive and commitment can attend.

Visit the national monuments in Washington, D.C., at night. If you really want to be inspired, hire my friend Kip Ross as your tour guide. As you stand on the Lincoln Memorial in the same spot as Dr. King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech, ask Kip to tell you what it was like to be there that day.

Read the great American novels "To Kill a Mockingbird," "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Roots." These books are part of our national DNA.

Take a child to a major league baseball game, and fill out an official score card together. Buy some peanuts and Cracker Jacks, and enjoy our American pastime.

Visit the World Trade Center site as a reminder of what evil looks like, and recommit to be ever vigilant against it.

Embrace Barack Obama. Whether you voted for him or not, he is the president of the United States and, as such, has earned our respect, courtesy and commitment. He is a true American success story.

Now that I've given you a start, go ahead and add some more. No other nation on earth has so much to offer us.

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