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### CENTRAL NEW JERSEY SHARES A POEM ON FREEDOM BY WORLD TRADE CENTER VICTIM DAVID SCOTT SUAREZ

HONORABLE RUSH HOLT OF NEW JERSEY  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 11, 2002

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with you excerpts from a story that World Trade Center victim David Scott Suarez wrote about two hiking trips he had taken several years apart, and a poem he wrote about climbing as a metaphor for life and for freedom. David writes about freedom, both in terms of the struggle to attain it and the unparalleled joy of having it. In a sense, David's story reminds us that freedom is not free. It requires hard work and undaunting perseverance. Freedom can only be attained when people work, together with others, exerting all of the collective strength of the unified group, to ascend its peak. One could interpret David's story to say that freedom is not even a choice, but rather a requirement for the realization of human potential, and that freedom should be our example to the world that we shout from the mountaintops.

David's parents, Ted and Carol Suarez, have so far had his poem translated into over 90 languages, including three of the major languages spoken in Afghanistan. They offer their son's story and poem in hopes that they will show all of the people of the world how much they have in common, so that we will always choose to communicate with each other rather than fight, and so that their son's death and the death of so many others on September 11 will not have been in vain. The following are excerpts from "Return to Freedom", by David Suarez.

"My legs burned. My heart pounded. A bead of sweat ran down my forehead to the tip of my nose. I wiped it off with the back of my dirty arm just before it dripped to the ground. The air was cool and the wind grew fiercer the higher into the atmosphere we climbed. It froze sweat to my skin and blew my hair every which way, occasionally stinging my eyes. I looked up past Bob, who was directly in front of me, but I could not see our destination. The peak was covered in clouds. . . . Hail pelted my raincoat. The trail we'd been hiking quickly turned to a swiftly flowing stream. The sky lit up. Thunder cracked simultaneously. I began to hear the slow cracking of, not thunder but wood. We all turned abruptly. A tree fell across the path 50 yards behind us, its top shattered and smoking.

Only nine miles to go, but the weather showed no signs of letting up. At night we were going to make camp on top of Mount Philip at 11,711 feet . . . It was thirteen miles away and a strenuous climb from where we broke camp in the morning. Unfortunately, that day was worse than any other had been. Like myself, the other guys in the expedition were pretty melancholy. . . . All I could think about was the 40 pound pack and the ice covered ground that kept me from moving forward with any sort of speed. . . . It continued to storm.

I trudged on. Stepping one foot in front of the other. . . . If I'd had a choice I'd have stopped, but there was no choice. Stopping meant hypothermia, which was worse than walking.

Hours later, we reached the top. My hands were red. The tips of my fingers were almost white; they were completely numb. The clouds were so thick I couldn't see more than a few feet ahead. Everyone else was in the same condition, some worse. . . . There were fourteen of us, only six were able to pitch tents . . . . We pitched one after another. I thought each one along the way would be my last. Finally we finished and everyone was safe. Then, miraculously, the moment our tent was ready for sleep the clouds blew away and the warm sun came out. . . .

That was it, I was the last man standing. I was so excited I started to run to the peak . . . . I reached it minutes later. . . . I leaned back against the flagpole that stood higher than everything else. A smile of contentment crossed my face. I shut my eyes and fell asleep to the sound of the American Flag snapping in the wind. I was free.

Three thousand miles and five years later I was feeling the same thing. Freedom, what a strong word it is. Millions of people had died in its name. Do people fully understand and appreciate this single word? Do I? A month earlier I sat out on the lawn under the shade of a tall oak attending my Asian philosophy class. After class I walked past a preacher yelling that all of my peers (and myself) were doomed to hell. I walked further and saw a stand with pictures of marijuana leaves all around, apparently fighting for its legality. I sat down and watched a couple walk past hand in hand and smiling. It was July 3. The impact of what was occurring before me hit me like a blow. I was living the dream that so many had died for. I belonged to a select group of people that could enjoy life as it should be enjoyed. In day to day life I often didn't realize that. . . . My mind and my talents marked the limits of where I could go. No one else dictated them.

Those thoughts reentered my mind as I climbed to the top of Sugarbush Mountain in central Maine. Climbing became a metaphor for life. We were almost at the top and the wind was blowing fiercely. We had entered the clouds and couldn't see a thing. At one point I opened my jacket and leaned into the wind. It supported my weight for a while. Together we reached the top. We raised our hands and screamed loudly for the world to hear. We'd conquered this mountain. Although the steep slopes tried to keep us down, they couldn't. Although our lives threatened to trap us in dull routine, we escaped. We were in charge of our destinies, only us. For a moment the clouds cleared. It seemed as if we could see the entire world at once. In silence we watched. We were free."

*You are free*  
*By David S. Suarez*

*The air is cool,  
the sky is dark,  
your muscles relax,  
while nature's breath fills your lungs  
You have accomplished your tasks,  
felt the pain,  
and endured the pressure,  
a pressure so immense  
that you lived to escape  
You have climbed to the very peak of the mountain  
and now relax on a rock,  
high above the trees  
while others sleep  
you are enveloped by nature's beauty  
for just a moment you abandon your incarcerated body  
wholly relinquishing your ties to human nature  
and for only an instant, you become part of God  
you are free*