1939

Kalispell - Pioneer Picnic

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
Western Montana is beautiful but northwestern Montana is superb. There are many highly publicized scenic areas but this is the only one which makes my heart leap and gives me a sense of exultation I cannot describe. Our mountains, creeks, trees, lakes, and peaceful valleys furnish a sight that is incomparable. This is home to us - this is the place in the whole world we hold most dear.

At the University it has been my privilege to meet many of your sons and daughters and in my trips to Kalispell, Whitefish, Columbia Falls, and the Park I've become acquainted with some of you. In knowing you I've known the real American west. You have been hospitable, courteous, and friendly. You have gone out of your way to make me feel at home and I want to tell you I appreciate it.

Many of us have travelled in a good many foreign lands and seen sights the fame of which have come down through the ages. We have come in contact with different customs, cultures, and people but we are always happiest when we are home again in Montana. This is God's country and those of us who live here know and appreciate the fact.

It's a tonic to see your smiling, friendly faces and to know that you are enjoying yourselves. That's what we want to see in this country of ours because friendliness and humor are the two basic foundations of any real people. They are characteristic of the West and you have implanted them into us, your sons and daughters.
We are a friendly people and have been since this continent was founded and our government inaugurated. Our ancestors had to fight the wilderness to open this land for us but in the struggle a real understanding arose between strangers - and sometimes between enemies - so that the result eventually was a spirit of cooperation and compromise. We did not try to enforce the idea that everything we said or did was perfect because, being human, we realized our limitations. We acknowledged, gladly and willingly, that only God is perfect.

We were willing - and still are - to "split the difference" as far as opinions and ideas were concerned. We wanted to - and we did - get along with our neighbors and practice the Golden Rule of 'doing unto others as we would have done unto us'. That's the right thing to do and that's the spirit of democracy.

Friendliness cannot be subservient because then it degenerates into boot-licking, now can it be superior else it becomes condescending and harmful. It must be common and it must recognize no distinctions. In other words it must be American because we do not recognize anything but equality in all things. This has become an American trait which is inborn into those of us who are natives, and acquired by those of us who come from foreign lands. My father and mother were both immigrants and I'm intensely proud of the fact and grateful to them that they chose America as the land to migrate to. We are all Americans and we glory in it. When I think of
the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights I thank God that He has seen fit to establish a country such as ours where one is neither superior nor inferior, but just an American.

When our forefathers came to this country and when you pioneers helped to open Western Montana you fought for and achieved freedom of speech, of press, of religion, and of opportunity. Freedom and equality are significant to us because they represent the very marrow of our backbone. They are the symbols for which we are willing to go through hell and high water, and as long as there is a country such as ours inhabited by people like you those symbols will continue to be realities and not merely things to talk about.

You have created equality because you fought for it; you have given us freedom because you desired it; and you have given us life because you loved it.

Friendliness also implies understanding. We do not question our neighbors nor seek to pry into their business. We respect their feelings and attitudes just as we expect them to respect ours. Of course, there are and always will be, differences among us but that is something we can understand and tolerate. The vice is to be intolerant, the virtue to be understanding.

Closely allied with friendliness is humor which is a God-given gift capable of making all men one. We, in the West, have given our share of humorists to this country of ours in the Bret Harte, and Will Rogers of bygone days.
Those, and others like them, have tickled our funny-bones and made us laugh even in times of trouble and to them we owe a debt of incalculable gratitude. What this country always must have is a Will Rogers who can make our troubles and problems seem small merely by prescribing doses of humor for us which will cause us to forget our solemnity and teach us how to enjoy life as we should. The result is that we, unlike other peoples, do not have exaggerated opinions of ourselves.

How different this spirit of friendliness and humor which characterizes you is from the spirit of distrust and hate in other countries! In Germany, Italy, Russia, and Japan are people who live but under what circumstances? They are regimented and told what to do and what not to do. Freedom, equality, and justice are words only and defined only from the Communist, Fascist, or Nazi point of view. Those people aren't smiling, or friendly, or humorous, but rather they are grim and fearful. The law under which they live is the law of a dictator - not the law of a people. Free gatherings are practically unknown and massed assemblages - unless on order - prohibited. At the present time, the Fascists share God's prerogatives, and the Communists monopolize them.
Contrast that with this and you will realize — as I know you have — that there is no compromise between the two. We are indeed fortunate to live under a flag and in a country such as ours where we can practice what we preach; where we can disagree but still remain friends; where we can laugh at anything and not be punished for it; and where we can live and enjoy life to the utmost knowing full well that tomorrow the sun will shine and that all is well with America.