



Text Version of Audio Story: Statue of Liberty

It was October 28, 1886. A cold, rainy, blustery fall day in New York City. Throngs of people were gathering. New York harbor was filled with parading boats. This was the day, 20 years in the making. This was the day she was finally finished. This was the day of the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty.

It all started at an evening party in France, a party where a group of French intellectuals had assembled for a simple and friendly evening dinner. The host of the party, a gentleman who embraced the idea of liberty, thought it would be fitting for the people of France to bestow a gift upon the people of America. After all, America was the cradle of liberty, and her people were her stewards protecting its ideals.

A well-known French sculptor was in attendance at the dinner, and it was quickly tossed around that perhaps he could create a statue honoring liberty. Who would have guessed that the process from conception to completion would take 20 years and be fraught with so many obstacles.

The first and greatest obstacle was simply that most American people did not want the gift. Even though it was a gift, there would still be great expense as the people of America would have to find a place for her and then build the colossal base to hold the statue. The second problem was simply cash. Not only the aforementioned cash on the American side, but the French found themselves and the project strapped for cash. Thanks to fundraising efforts and, in great part, promotion by the well-known newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer, the needed funds were finally raised.

Bedloe's Island in New York harbor became the agreed-upon site. And on the cold October day in 1886, Lady Liberty won her hard-fought battle to become an American. Millions of Americans have passed under the torch of Liberty, and even more millions of Americans can trace their lineage to ancestors who braved the Atlantic to pass under Liberty's torch and seek out the American Dream.

This past Saturday found me in the barber chair of my old friend, Pete, the Italian barber. I quizzed him, and he recounted his meeting of Lady Liberty. His face took on a boyish gaze as he spoke of how he passed by, unable to take his eyes off of her. Pete came alone. He was 15 years old when he boarded a ship in the Old World to brave the 28-day high-seas adventure and become part of the New World. His mother gave him a roll of provolone cheese, two gallons of water and several loaves of bread. He traded some of his cheese and bread for potatoes with the Irish. He had one change of clothing.

I asked Pete, *“How much English did you know at that time?”* He smiled at me and he held up his hand using his thumb and index finger to form a zero.

Today, 50 years later, Pete speaks with flawless English and is a successful businessman. The rest of his family, including his mother who still lives and enjoys robust health at age 88, would make their way to America, also.

The plaque at the Statue of Liberty with the poem by Emma Lazarus reads, *“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shores, send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

I guess what the poem really says, if one reads between the lines, it says, *“Hey, send me your barber Petes of the world, and let me mentor them. Let me mold them under the tutelage of Liberty.”*

From somewhere behind the radio with the music of Johnny X, I’m the American Storyteller.