



Freedom Is

Seeking the Meaning of Liberty

By Mark Ray

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Freedom, wrote Kris Kristofferson in "Me and Bobby McGee," is "just another word for nothing left to lose." But Eagle Scout Alex Robson knows that's just one way to define the word. In fact, since 2005, the Atlanta resident has gathered some 650 definitions of freedom, each written or typed on a 3" x 5" index card by an actor or an activist, a preacher or a politician, a musician or a military veteran, a celebrity or a Scout. Participants in the project have included presidents, Supreme Court justices, Nobel laureates, Medal of Honor recipients and veterans from every major conflict since World War I.

Robson, who teaches at GIVE Center West, a Norcross, Ga., alternative school, started The Freedom Cards project when he himself was in high school. "The project began as an effort to draw together people who were very different," he says. Early on, that meant contacting people from opposite ends of the political spectrum, but over the years Robson has reached out to very disparate groups: Tuskegee Airmen and Confederate-flag supporters, Gold Star mothers and peace activists, Syrian refugees and Islamist terrorists. He has received cards from WikiLeaks figure Chelsea Manning, shoe bomber Richard Reid and CIA whistle-blower John Kiriakou.

And then there are the murders. Texas death-row inmate Willie Trottie wrote that freedom in part meant knowing what drugs would be used to end his life. Robson received that card two weeks after Trottie's 2014 execution.

Not all the cards Robson has received bear such heavy messages, however. Joyce Carol Oates described freedom as "the very oxygen of the human spirit." Billy Crystal

said freedom is “America—our most precious gift.” And Kris Kristofferson wrote that freedom is.... Well, you already know what his card said.

To view all 650 cards—and to learn how to contribute your own—visit <http://freedomcards.tumblr.com>.