

BBC RADIO 2
NIGHT TIME PAUSE FOR THOUGHT
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On this 4th July I am remembering my first visit to America.

It wasn't what I expected.

I had grown up with an image of mighty skyscrapers and big fast cars from 'Starsky and Hutch'.

I was expecting huge cities with fire hydrants splashing water on the side walks with cops and robbers and drug dealers and Big Bird from Sesame St.

But I ended up in rural Pennsylvania and it wasn't like that at all.

On my first visit to the United States I found myself in Amish country.

It's a beautiful rural landscape lightly populated by peace loving communities of farmers.

The Amish people are Christians who believe in complete separation from the world.

No cars, no electricity, no phones and little contact with the outside world.

The Amish wear simple clothes, travel in horse drawn buggies and centre their lives on family and church.

I'd never seen anything like it.

The Amish also believe that all violence by anyone in all circumstances is wrong. And of course they've suffered for that. They ended up in Pennsylvania because they had to flee persecution in Europe for refusing to fight in wars.

All of this was new to me. Where I grew up all that "love your enemies" stuff didn't seem to get very much attention.

The Amish people I met in America didn't just talk about love and forgiveness and turning the other cheek – they practiced it.

I could hardly believe it.

On this 4th July as I think about my experience of the Amish I'm also reminded of the words of another American who was committed to non violence, Dr Martin Luther King.

In the 1960s he believed that the world was in such a state that we *had* to love our enemies or else humanity had no future.

He said, “the chain reaction of hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars must be broken”.

He said “Darkness cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that.”

So on this Independence Day why not celebrate by remembering the challenging words of a great American leader, or by reflecting on the lives of the gentle Amish people and be inspired to build peace and reconciliation wherever and whenever you can.