
Katharine Lee Bates

1859 - 1929

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

Does this poem sound familiar to you? Of course, it is one of the most beloved patriotic songs in American history. What is really cool is that the poet was here in Colorado Springs, looking around at our beautiful backyard, admiring God's creation from Pike's Peak as she wrote this poem. It was set to music and now we sing this hymn because it reminds us of the U.S.'s rich beauty.

Katharine Lee Bates was born on August 12th, 1859, in Falmouth, Massachusetts. She had one older sister and two older brothers. Her father went to Middlebury College in Vermont. Her mother was a schoolteacher at their school. A month after she was born, her father took the position to be a minister at the church they went to. Sadly, a little after that, Katherine's father died of a tumor, which left the family with financial problems. The older siblings took jobs to support the family. Her mother sold produce, while her two older brothers earned money for picking cranberries and hunting and selling animal skins. Everybody in the household did a piece of work to help pay the bills.

After she graduated college in 1890, she took the position as a high school teacher at Natick High School. Three years later, she became a member of the English department at Wellesley College. There, she received respect from both teachers and students for her innovative ideas. Even though she worked a lot, she also had time to write. She wrote 40 books!

Bates traveled a lot, both internationally and in the western states of the U.S. She always wrote down inspiration

for poetry in her journal. Sometimes it was something that someone said, and other times it was something she saw. During her stay in Colorado, she took a hike to the top of Pike's Peak, where she saw the beauty of America.

I believe God inspired Bates with creativity the day that she stood on top of that "14er." She saw the majesty of our country and wrote, "America the Beautiful."

By the way, have you ever wondered about some of the other verses to this poem?

O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare of freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife.
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine!

O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

References:

Beautiful.", "America the. "America the Beautiful." *Dictionary of American History*, Encyclopedia.com, 2019, www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/performing-arts/music-history/america-beautiful.

“Lyrics.” *America The Beautiful*, www.americathebeautiful.com/lyrics.htm.