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### **Ron Rossani:**

Testimonial: A Tale of Honor, Ideals and Sacrifice (Abridged)

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They were men and women of principles. They came to embrace a prescient idea where no encumbrance of freedom would pervade the new lands they so eagerly embraced. They sought liberation from the impediments and ennui in Europe and petitioned for change. Tempered by their resolve, a consortium of 56 Americans traveled to Pennsylvania in July of 1776 to dissolve the bonds of foreign entanglements and build a nation.

The genesis of their proposed action was to promulgate a schism from England by declaring their assent to do so by affixing their signatures on a Declaration of Independence.

One of the signers of that Declaration of Independence, Richard Henry Lee, a delegate from Virginia, had introduced a prior motion. His remarks ignited the patriotic fervor in his contemporaries: “Why then, sir,” (said he, in conclusion,) “why do we longer delay? Why still deliberate? Let this happy day give birth to an American republic. Let her arise, not to devastate and to conquer, but to reestablish the reign of peace and of law.....”

Formally adopted on July 4, 1776 and finalized on August 2, their Declaration of Independence planted the revolutionary seeds in the fertile soil conceived around that document’s proclamations. The germination, watered by the blood of these Americans, thirsting for freedom, was not quenched by steeping the bitter English tea in Boston Harbor.

Those men knew the risks, but as William Ellery, one of the founders of Rhode Island College and visionary abolitionist held that there was no discernible fear exuded by his fellow compatriots. Ellery’s sexagenarian colleague from Rhode Island and Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, Stephan Hopkins, signed that document with a shaking hand and declared: “My hand trembles, but my heart does

not.”

As a consequence from his signature on that hallowed document and for his emboldened act of defiance to the Crown, Ellery's dwelling house was subsequently burned.

The British marked every member of Congress as having adjudged to their treason. Death, infirmity, bankruptcies and misfortunes plagued these Patriots. Lives, Fortunes, Sacred Honor Thomas McKeam was a member of the Stamp Act Congress and President of the Continental Congress. In a correspondence with his friend and co-signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Adams, he declared; “.....hunted like a fox by the enemy, compelled to remove my family five times in three months, and at last fixed them in a little log-house on the banks of the Susquehanna, but they were soon obliged to move again on account of the incursions of the Indians.”

Francis Lewis, one of the New York delegates, had his extensive library and valuable papers wantonly destroyed. His home was ransacked along with his estates, which were decimated by British soldiers. His wife was captured and brutalized, and although subsequently exchanged for two British prisoners, Mrs. Lewis later succumbed from that abject abuse.

Pennsylvania delegate George Clymer narrowly escaped with his family. Their property was forfeited and summarily razed by the British.

William Floyd, a General and commander of the Long Island Militia, was able to escape with his wife and children to Connecticut, where they lived as homeless and penniless refugees.

Philip Livingstone had his immense holdings in New York confiscated. His family was driven out of their home, but Livingstone still held true to his beliefs and patriotic zeal and worked unstintingly as a viable member of Congress, until his death.

Louis Morris, a New York delegate, saw his timber, crops, and livestock expropriated by the British. His tract of woodland in Morrisania of more than a thousand acres was decimated. His home was seized and transformed into a British military compound. He was barred from contact with his family.

John Hart of Trenton, New Jersey, risked his life to care for his ailing wife, Deborah. When he left Philadelphia to take his seat in the state legislature at Princeton, his farm, livestock, grist mills and property were damaged by Hessian mercenaries. Hart hid from the British and Hessians, at one point hiding in a natural rock formation. Emaciated and heartbroken, with his wife deceased in October of 1776 and his family in disarray, Hart endured another iniquity when his properties were sold off for a pittance.

Judge Richard Stockton, another New Jersey delegate, returned to his estate in an effort to rescue his wife and children. The family found refuge with friends, but a Tory sympathizer betrayed them. Stockton was beaten, starved and confined to Provost Prison. The British burned his library, destroyed his livestock and looted his property. Stockton remained a prisoner for some time and increasingly became despondent over the loss of his family and possessions. Judge Stockton never recovered his health. Subsequent to his imprisonment, Stockton became an invalid and his family was forced to live off charity. He died a pauper at the age of 51.

Another signer, Robert Morris of Philadelphia, who was financially secure, donated much of his substantial wealth to the Revolutionary cause. He lost his considerable holdings in supporting the American fledgling navy. Throughout the war he personally underwrote the operations of privateer ships that ran the British Blockades, thus bringing essential supplies and capital into the colonies. Morris, the “financier of the Revolution,” placed principle over profit. For his sacrifices on behalf of his country, Morris was confined to a debtor's prison.

Thomas Lynch, Jr., the company commander of the 1st South Carolina regiment, beleaguered from the vagaries of war, ventured to the West Indies for a respite and cure. The ship on which he and his young bride sailed was lost at sea. Their bodies were never recovered.

Edward Rutledge was captured by the British in the fall of Charleston, and held

prisoner until July 1781.

Arthur Middleton served in the defense of Charleston. After the city's fall to the British in 1780, he was sent to prison in St. Augustine, Florida. A substantial amount of his holdings and estates were liquidated by the British and Loyalists.

Joseph Hewes sacrificed his fleet of ships for the fledgling American Navy. Hewes expended sums of money to outfit them for war. One of the captains of Hewes' ships was John Paul Jones.

Brigadier General Thomas Nelson Jr., of Virginia, witnessed his personal fortune ravaged by the Revolutionary War. He was never compensated for the considerable amount he apportioned to the French fleet. His personal loan to help finance Virginia's war expenditures were never repaid by the state. While in command of the Virginia Militia forces, as legend avers, he ordered his artillery to direct their fire on his house which was occupied by Lord Cornwallis. Crestfallen and impoverished, he died of asthma in 1789 and was buried in an unmarked grave in order that his creditors could not hold his body as collateral.

Abraham Clark's two sons, Aaron and Thomas were captured by the British.

James Witherspoon's son, James, lost his life at the Battle of Germantown.

Carter Braxton invested a great deal of his wealth in the American Revolution.

Braxton loaned money to the cause, funded privateers and other vital interests while the British were occupying Braxton's plantations.

Judge Thomas Heyward, Jr., was held captive. His plantation was decimated by a party of marauders; some of his workers were captured, ostensibly to become indentured servants on sugar plantations in Jamaica.

Benjamin Franklin sardonically noted: "Indeed we must all hang together; otherwise we shall most assuredly hang separately."

Who among you now would be able to carry the standard into battle now that those freedoms, so valiantly guarded by those brave and unselfish Patriots listed below, have been eviscerated?

As Thomas Jefferson noted: "Experience hath shown, that even under the best forms of government those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny"

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Virginia: George Wythe, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Francis Lightfoot Lee, Carter Braxton

Pennsylvania: Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Morton, George Clymer, James Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson, George Ross  
Georgia: Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton

North Carolina: William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn

South Carolina: Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton

Massachusetts: John Hancock

Maryland: Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Delaware: Caesar Rodney, George Read, Thomas McKean

New York: William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, Lewis Morris

New Jersey: Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart, Abraham Clark

New Hampshire: Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton

Massachusetts: Samuel Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island: Stephen Hopkins, William Ellery

Connecticut: Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott

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These Patriots had a great deal to lose from their act of insurrection than to be gained by it. They were aware that the loss of personal possessions would be relegated to an aura of indifference as long as their honor was untarnished and their principles remained inviolate. They were cognizant of what they risked and what they attempted to achieve.

For the renaissance of a nation, they mutually pledged to each other their Lives, their Fortunes and their sacred Honor.

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