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## **Why I Am a Libertarian**

**by Mark Richards**

Over the years many people — family members, co-workers, and others — with whom I have come in contact have asked me why I think and believe what I do with regard to politics, economics, history, philosophy, and related topics. To put it another way, these people are curious as to what influences and experiences in my life have led me to be an advocate of the libertarian philosophy of individual freedom with regard to the issues of the day.

I would have to say that my late mother Phyllis Richards was a profound influence in my life. She always encouraged me to read and to think for myself. A deeply religious woman and a devout Christian, my mother was not one to accept viewpoints of the clergy that she knew to be wrong or based on lies.

A case in point would be the “social gospel” (or should I say “socialist gospel”!) that our Episcopal Church was promoting during the 1960s. My mother didn’t care if our local minister or the bishop himself was advocating anti-individualist and pro-collectivist causes — she spoke up and defied their smug arrogance! She set a great example for me in not being afraid to speak up and defend liberty over statism.

In 1964 my mom gave me a “Goldwater for President” button to wear to school, which I did. My fifth-grade teacher was aghast! I wore that Goldwater button despite her snide comments. The teacher was rabidly pro-Lyndon Johnson and had no problem with my 10-year-old classmates wearing Johnson buttons, I guess I was becoming a libertarian at that age.

As the 1960s wore on, the mess in Vietnam just got worse, and again my mother knew something wasn’t right and that the government was lying. In the summer of 1967 we were at a local county fair here in New Jersey when our family came upon a booth that was being rented by a well-known and controversial organization of that time — the John Birch Society.

The Birch Society, which was an organization of “constitutional conservatives,” had a table full of literature. Much of it had to do with exposing the fraud that was the Vietnam War. To my mom, it only confirmed what she had long expected regarding the lies of the Johnson administration in getting America mired down in Southeast Asia. How could we be “fighting

communism” over there and be promoting a socialistic welfare state under the banner of Johnson’s “Great Society” programs here at home? So at age 13 and entering the eight grade that September, I was an opponent of the Vietnam War.

However, I had limited sympathy for the antiwar protesters on the college campuses since I felt they were opposing the war for the wrong reasons. I also didn’t agree with many of them on waving the flag of communist North Vietnam at many of the antiwar rallies. So here I was a young teenager in the late 1960s and I didn’t like the liberal left that was manipulating the youth in America at that time but I also rejected the “establishment” (the government and its allies in the media, public education, and the churches) which I knew was lying to the American people.

It was through those John Birch Society publications that my mother had picked up at that country fair that I first became acquainted with economists and authors like Ayn Rand, Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman, F.A. Hayek, Henry Hazlitt, Murray Rothbard, and others who were proponents of the freedom philosophy. By the time I graduated from high school in 1972, I was convinced that my worldview was that of a libertarian. I really enjoyed the consistent application of individualism to all issues that libertarians advocated, as opposed to the partial defense of liberty espoused by conservatives and liberals.

When I found out that there was a Libertarian Party that I could actually vote for, I was elated to say the least. I started voting for Libertarians locally here in New Jersey in 1973. 1976 was the first time I voted for a Libertarian presidential candidate when Roger MacBride ran. (John Hospers, the 1972 candidate, wasn’t on the ballot here in New Jersey in that first election after the Libertarian Party’s founding.)

I’m proud to say that I have voted for a Libertarian presidential candidate in every election since. I officially joined the Libertarian Party in 1980 during Ed Clark’s campaign. I signed up my mom and dad and my one cousin as members soon after. My mother was a member until she passed way in 1994.

Have there been times when I regretted following the course I did? There have been moments when “following the crowd” would have made me more popular or resulted in better job opportunities perhaps. But it in the long run, I do not regret my choice one bit. I can look at myself in the mirror and go to sleep each night with a clear conscience.

I don’t know how many other libertarians have had similar experiences in life that formed and shaped their ideas, but what I have related to you is my story. I trust and hope that others may draw some inspiration from it.

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