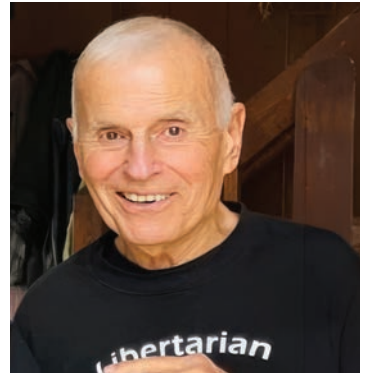


Forced Choices: How Joe Harrison's Life Experiences Shaped His Libertarian Philosophy

By Brian Mullis



Joe Harrison wasn't quite a libertarian at 16 years old, but by then he was already drawing the ire of a labor union official. Soon after Joe began a new retail job, a surly man approached him, grabbed the shopping cart he was pushing, and demanded: "Get your apron off. Get out of here!" As it turned out, Joe had worked too many hours, according to the union labor rules—without even realizing he was union labor. Later that night he got a call from his manager explaining the rules against working too hard.

"That really disturbed me," Joe recalls.

A decade later, in 1963, Joe received another blow to his freedom to choose when he was drafted into the peacetime military as a 25-year-old with a new bride. Until then, Joe had been working in a high-tech job with complex computer systems.

"The first computer I worked on had 400 vacuum tubes and went down into a nuclear submarine," Joe says. "And with my experience, after I was drafted, they made me a radio repairman."

Not only had he been forced into something against his will, but the government declined to even use his talents while he was there.

These events are connected to a question Joe has continued to ask repeatedly throughout his life, which speaks to his principled individualism: "Who decides?" If it's someone else making the choices for him, Joe, like many Cato Sponsors, becomes wary.

After serving in the military, Joe and his wife, Josephine, eventually moved to suburban Chicago, where they raised their three children. Joe became a civil engineer, graduating from the University of Illinois—Chicago. He designed storm sewers for

the City of Chicago and recalls the inception and design of the Deep Tunnel Project as a great achievement in his career.

Over the course of their 44-year marriage, Joe and Josephine were also business partners, before she lost her battle with breast cancer. The government made that devastating fight even worse by forbidding individual choice in Josephine's medical care. The Harrisons found that their desire to turn to medical marijuana as a potential source of relief from Josephine's sickness would make them criminals for simply doing what they felt was best for them.

"Government shouldn't be doing this to people who are hurting," Joe says.

Joe is partnering with Cato to advance the philosophy of libertarianism and his belief in the dignity of the individual. In addition to his annual contributions to Cato, Joe named the Institute as the beneficiary of a specially created individual retirement account.

"I view this as an opportunity to make a significant contribution to our fight for freedom," Joe says. "I'm so proud and happy to support Cato's work." ♦

For information on Cato's Legacy Society, please contact Brian Mullis at bmullis@cato.org. To learn more about planned giving, please visit Cato.org/plannedgiving.



Scan the QR code to the left with your phone's camera to become a Sponsor of the Cato Institute.