

# Remembering David Boaz: Colleagues and Friends Share Their Memories



David's commitment to libertarian principles was so solidly rooted in reasoned analysis that he seemed sincerely perplexed when any intelligent, thoughtful person disagreed with his libertarian position on any issue. I was honored that he evidently considered me smart and reasonable enough that I *should* agree with these views, and he therefore seemed baffled in the (relatively few) instances when I did not. Over the many years of our collegueship, David's probing questions, insights, and arguments did modify some of my ideas, and they will continue to inspire me to engage in constant reexamination. In that meaningful way, I'll always gratefully channel David—right along with John Stuart Mill!

—**Nadine Strossen, former president,  
American Civil Liberties Union**

David has been our intellectual godfather and superstar of the libertarian movement. Second to no one, he's been responsible for injecting libertarian ideas into public discourse.

—**Robert A. Levy, chairman emeritus,  
Cato Institute**

In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Homer describes a person who shows his strength of mind by his power of speech: "When he comes to town, the crowds gather." That was David Boaz. Alert, vigorous, ready for anything, intimately acquainted with the facts he needed, he was the most articulate advocate that any movement could hope to find. David was my friend for four decades, and he was a warm and helpful friend to the journal I edit, *Liberty*. I refuse to believe he isn't with us still. His significance for the cause of freedom cannot be measured. His achievements will never be forgotten.

—**Stephen Cox, distinguished professor  
emeritus, University of California,  
San Diego**

The hardest I ever struggled not to laugh was over dinner with David Boaz on Saturday, August 28, 1993. David was despondent because, all week long, no one at Cato had as much as mentioned his upcoming 40th birthday. No party, no card;

how could they have forgotten? It was no use to console him, which I pretended to do—all while fighting not to expel my drink through my nose. I pointed out that at least Andrea and Howie Rich and I would take him out for a celebratory drink the next day.

Of course, that's not what happened Sunday. Instead, when David walked into Duke Ziebert's, then Washington's most famous restaurant, he was greeted by balloons, decorations, and a lusty "SURPRISE!" from over a hundred colleagues and friends. Ed Crane led the tributes, which were ample, and friends came from near and far. I, relieved, was finally able to laugh.

I'm still laughing at the prank—and still cherish the memory of showing David so memorably that he was admired and loved.

**—Jonathan Rauch, senior fellow, Brookings Institution**

For five decades he worked to secure equal liberty for each and every human being. It was his life mission, to which he hewed with extraordinary steadfastness. . . . David Boaz is our inspiration. He never stopped. He never will, because when we fight for the rule of law, he is with us. He will always be with us.

**—Tom Palmer, senior fellow, Cato Institute; George M. Yeager Chair for Advancing Liberty and executive vice president for international programs, Atlas Network**

I last saw David before his illness at a garden party at Walter Olson's home in 2022. David had been trying unsuccessfully to get Ed Crane to agree to be interviewed about the early history of the libertarian movement and his perspectives on what was happening to it. He thought if I were the interviewer, Ed might agree. I enthusiastically agreed to try (and I did, also unsuccessfully). It was classic David Boaz. On one dimension, he was, as

always, being clinical and dispassionate. Ed had important material to contribute. On another dimension, unspoken, as always, David was being kind and compassionate. In my experience, that was David: a consistent Ayn Rand rationalist on the surface; underneath, not for public exhibition, caring and loyal.

**—Charles Murray, Hayek emeritus scholar, American Enterprise Institute**

At a Club for Growth meeting, I heard Marco Rubio talk about the beauty of free markets and I thought, "Finally, a politician who really gets it! He will fight for individual freedom!" I happened to share that thought with David. He replied, "It's dangerous to fall in love with a politician. They will break your heart every time." As usual, David was right.

**—John Stossel, Stossel TV**

I met David at Vanderbilt University in the early 1970s. Among many other things, he led our efforts to bring prominent speakers, such as then California governor Ronald Reagan and *National Review* founder and editor William F. Buckley Jr., to campus, which was no small feat given the prevailing hostility to free-market ideas. Despite being only one year older, David was my intellectual leader, mentor, and friend. He spent his entire life promoting liberty and made massive contributions to the cause.

**—William B. Lacy, former director of President Ronald Reagan's Office of Political Affairs**

When I think of the most effective advocates of individual freedom in my generation, David Boaz is Number One, and there is no Number Two.

**—Walter Olson, senior fellow, Cato Institute**