

# Karen De Coster

*“Toward Freedom” is an Everything-Voluntary.com series sharing personal stories about the journey toward freedom. Archived stories can be found [here](#). Submit your story to the editor.*

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Typically, when I say I’m a praxeological austro-paleolibertarian, Rothbardian anarchocapitalist extremist, Hoppean propertarian, and politically incorrect canonist, people say “Huh?”

The womb was perhaps the birthplace of my libertarianism. After all, I have no Leftist past lurking in my yesteryears, and no prior liberal leanings, unless you want to count the days when I was fifteen, working at Arthur Treacher’s Fish & Chips for two-something per hour, and cheering on congressional attempts at raising the minimum wage to three-something per hour. I figured with a raise like that I’d finally be able to afford one of those cool, portable eight-track players. With that kind of reasoning behind me, one can easily absolve me of my earliest economic worldviews.

During my elementary school years, I became an avid reader. This bookmobile thing (a bus turned into a library on wheels) would park on the corner at the end of my street every Friday afternoon, and I’d run to it and ravish the shelves for the next great book. My interests started out with sports and animals, and by the end of my elementary school sentence, my focus had progressed to political biographies, news, and historical events.

I grew up six blocks from 8 Mile, the famous thoroughfare depicted in the current Eminem movie. Detroit was a political hotspot in the nation following the 1967 riot, with the busing issue right on its heels. This issue gave me my first taste of totalitarian government putting the clamp on the right of self-ownership, and thus my individualist radicalism was born.

I had some unusual early influences. In the eighth grade I borrowed an H.L. Mencken book from the city library. I couldn’t understand why everybody didn’t think and write like he did. Also, I became enamored of the Barry Goldwater legend. I read everything I could about him and the famous campaign that I was too young to have remembered. Despite all his faults and hawkish militarism, I was a Goldwaterite born too late.

In high school, I went through my Russell Kirk phase, absorbing his cultural conservatism and meshing that with my more radical anti-state thoughts. I called myself an “anti-government conservative” because the Libertarian Party was young and had not yet had an intellectual influence on me. In addition, I was oblivious to the fact that there was a process of systematic thinking to libertarianism at that time. Reading Kirk led me to

Edmund Burke, T.S. Eliot, James Burnham, and many of the other leading conservative writers.

I also took to watching the TV news, and Bill Bonds, the famous Detroit news anchorman, was my favorite character. It was simple stuff, but his constant assault on the political elite whetted my appetite for expressing my views more passionately. This is a guy that went on the air inebriated and challenged Detroit mayor Coleman Young to a boxing match, skewed the gay community for its sexual exploits, and berated the political-correctness police.

Unashamedly, I didn't often agree with my teachers, and I thought they were unoriginal and uncharismatic. I felt assaulted by the constant worshiping of presidents, political correctness, and government solutions for everything.

In addition, I followed in my parents' footsteps and eagerly awaited an end to the war in Vietnam. Guys in my neighborhood were getting yanked from their homes to die in rice paddies, and Nixon's promises to end the war always came up empty.

In my 9th-grade civics class, I saw a movie called *The Missiles of October*. (Isn't it amazing how well William Devane mimicked John Kennedy?) My first detailed thought upon watching the movie was how the media and Hollywood continually romanticized government and its leaders. These minions of the regime exalted political leaders, their wars, and their corrupt power trips. I saw that something was very wrong with such idolatry. Besides, that movie seemed to go on forever.

In fact, there was never any government official, in any movie, who ever appeared to be anything less than morally superior, with exceptional leadership abilities and overall God-like qualities. Then along came Oliver Stone to shed some light on that perception.

However, my first full-blown endeavor into politics came in junior high school. Looking back, it was an embarrassing state of affairs. I headed up the *Gerald Ford for President* campaign in the mock election for our social studies class. I knew I was staunchly anti-establishment, and I shunned liberalism, collectivism, and the welfare state—everything I thought Jimmy Carter stood for. I was discovering that I could not argue for government to do anything that interfered in the lives of individuals.

But please don't ask me to explain the Ford affair! A lesser of two evils thing, I suppose.

Next up for me was the Reagan rhetorical machine. I fell in love with Reagan's anti-statist rhetoric and his promotion of the individual as sovereign. He talked in libertarian-populist tones and romanticized a world where a free market would reign. Surely he did what every politician does when they actually get elected, but his early rhetoric had quite an influence on this high school dissident who was seeking legitimate status for her views.

I ended up doing some occasional work for the Reagan campaign—stuffing envelopes and that kind of thing. A turning point for me to get involved in his campaign was the anti-nuke protests of that time, which positively bugged me. I speak not of anti-war nuclear protests, but of the environmental movement where I saw free market haters chaining themselves to gates outside of nuclear power plants, railing against advancing technology, and generally, crusading for an end to the Western way of life.

Another great influence on my early libertarian philosophy was Ayn Rand. Oh sure, she eschewed libertarianism, and the orthodox Objectivists distorted the entire libertarian system; however, Rand's movement always had a profound influence on young, rational minds looking for an intellectual outlet. I thought Objectivism as a whole was corny, cultish, and overbearing, but there was much to cull from Rand's work for free markets and individual autonomy. Reading Rand's *Anthem* helped me realize what I was up against.

After Rand's fiction came her non-fiction, all of which I found worthy of reading. However, post-*Missiles of October* viewing, I became cured of any Cold War tendencies. If I ever thought it held any legitimacy at all, Rand's zealous military views cured me of that.

In the early eighties, I remember listening to a local radio talk show host by the name of Mark Scott. Though he is an Objectivist, Mark was and is unapologetically relentless in his fight against statism and societal leeches. I didn't always agree with him, but listening to someone who often thought and spoke like I did gave me even more initiative to immerse myself in my radical passions.

In the course of absorbing myself in the radicalism of Rand, I came upon a reference—perhaps through a footnote—to Ludwig von Mises. Reading Mises and learning of the Austrian School of economics sat perfectly with my worldviews on the free market, which by then had progressed well beyond my hopes for a boost in minimum wage from my fish-and-chips employer.

The war against Iraq in 1991 turned my libertarian views solidly toward a philosophy that saw the eradication of the State as necessary to recapturing freedom from full-blown oppression. During the war, I observed a public that was captivated by CNN's cartoon coverage of smart bombs and its play-by-play of sortie missions. The meaningless yellow ribbons of "support" that hung everywhere during the war were my clue that the masses were reminiscent of sheep going over a cliff. They bought it all, without question, and I knew I was not one of them.

If truth be told, Bush's war saw me go from being a skeptic of wars to being a full-blown opponent of the State and its quest for empire. Following Bush's war, Mark Scott had a gentleman on his radio show: Lew Rockwell from the Mises Institute. My co-workers and I listened to Lew talk for two hours on the evils of the Gulf war, the imperialist State, and the

political elite. I was stunned that Rockwell was saying things that were taboo within the collective, mainstream media.

Who was this Lew Rockwell guy and why had I never heard of the Mises Institute? At the behest of a co-worker egging me on, I called the Institute that day, got on its mailing list, and quickly received my first issue of the *Rothbard-Rockwell Report*. Hence, my introduction to Murray Rothbard, who became my greatest intellectual influence ever.

Unlike other libertarians who were transformed by great thinkers or particular events, I was not converted by Murray Rothbard's libertarian system. I was affirmed. Reading and learning from his texts taught me three very important things, the first being how to reason through my already principled thinking. He taught me how to mold my thoughts into a consistent philosophical system. Secondly, he taught me that I was not alone in my thinking. I had finally discovered there was more to this movement than the dusty old books I'd been checking out from libraries. After all, I had become distrusting of political processes, and that alone had kept me from ever having any immediate involvement with the Libertarian Party. Finally, Murray's wisdom taught me that libertarianism was indeed radical, and to be radical was not only okay, it was the ideal position.

Reading Murray led me to discover a bevy of influences, including Lysander Spooner, the 19th-century market anarchist; Albert Jay Nock, the anti-State libertarian; Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, the acclaimed conservative historian; Frédéric Bastiat, the 19th-century economist; C.S. Lewis, the Christian philosopher; and the great figures of the "Old Right," including H.L. Mencken, Garet Garrett, Frank Chodorov, John T. Flynn, and Robert A. Taft. I became an ardent student of the Old Right and its place in history.

Unfortunately, my first excursion to the Mises Institute was not until after Murray died, so I never experienced the joy of getting to know him. But all in all, it was Murray Rothbard and his generation of irrepressible leaders that inspired me to eventually take my own views out into the public to join in the crusade for freedom.

Little of my later adult life has been mentioned, because by that time, I was merely experiencing philosophical growth as opposed to radical transformation. My childhood to post-high school era was undeniably where the groundwork was laid for my becoming a libertarian. Although my parents had only a slight political influence on me while growing up, my Dad is the principled, self-educating type, and a John Galt of sorts. He definitely passed on his rebel genes to this daughter.

My growth post-Gulf War has included friendships with those whom I consider to be some of the top leaders in the modern libertarian movement. Without being surrounded with such magnificent friends and mentors, I doubt that I'd have been prompted to get as involved within the movement as I have become.

All in all, it's hard being on this side of the philosophical fence at a time like this. Where it's entirely robotic and painless to cheer along with the pro-war right, agree with the President's domestic actions, and parrot the standard policy lines, it's another thing to stand up for views that are ostracized by the thugs in power and their media shills.

It takes a bulletproof shell to stand on principle and abstain from reciting trendy ideas for the sake of popular status, but someone has to do it. And at [LewRockwell.com](http://LewRockwell.com) we all do it every day.