



## Whitney Ball: Losing a Sparkplug For Liberty

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Whitney Ball was always outraged for the right reasons and could be counted on to add the choicest comments to the latest political or cultural atrocity. She was bright, opinionated, well informed, and dedicated to human liberty. She also was a great friend. Those who knew her and the liberty movement were made much worse off with her passing on August 16.

Whitney is one of the largely unknown activists who did far more than her share to help keep everyone else busy, employed, and fed. She was born in coal-mining country, Morgantown, West Virginia, and graduated from Sweet Briar College, the sort of women's school that has gone out of fashion and faces possible extinction. She got into the movement early, working at the National Journalism Center for the late M. Stanton Evans—a grand figure who linked the older, more traditional and newer, more assertive conservative movements.

But Whitney never hesitated to take the lone road. She was a rare trifecta, a libertarian, Christian, and woman. We met when she worked at the Cato Institute a couple decades ago. She took her faith seriously and fulfilled Christ's injunction to his disciples as an excellent purveyor of salt and light. She could never hide her beliefs under a bushel, but exuded kindness and wit and was impossible to dislike. I enjoyed having a fellow traveler with whom I could lament the loss of virtue as well as liberty in society, while grumbling about our cohorts in the libertarian and conservative movements who seemed to care for one but not the other principle.

She moved on to the Philanthropy Roundtable, a conservative counterpart for the liberal Council on Foundations. There she worked with her good friend Kim Dennis. Whitney's libertarian sensitivities were not well-matched to John Walters, who took over from Dennis and later became George W. Bush's "drug czar." That encouraged Whitney to launch her own venture, Donors Trust, in 1999. From very modest beginnings—one account—DT turned into a major success. It hit roughly 200 contributors in 2013 and to date has channeled \$740 million to the cause of liberty.

There is a long history of freedom-minded donors' money being effectively hijacked by left-wing activists and causes. Money created from the inspiration and sweat of past entrepreneurs now funds some of the organizations most determined to stifling a free economy. It turns out that those most adept at creating wealth often aren't very good at controlling how it is distributed.

As Whitney later explained: “charitable capital that’s held in a vehicle like a private foundation often drifts away from the intent of its founding donor over time. The classic example is when the grandson of the founder of the Ford Foundation quit its board in disgust because of the way the organization had come to oppose what the founder stood for. Unfortunately, there are many similar examples, large and small.” This sort of adverse capture almost always works against advocates of a free society, she added.

Often donors only need information and guidance—and the right institutional vehicle—to ensure that their money is used in ways that more truly honor their lives and values. DT offers that assistance, making it possible for donors to be confident that their financial gains will not undermine others’ future liberties. DT also offers the opportunity for different donors to pool their efforts for greater effect. Donors contribute to DT, which has final legal say in all disbursements. But in practice DT ensures that donor intent is followed by creating an account for every donor and consulting on causes to be supported. Even after death DT attempts to carry through: donors may provide a list of suggested charities for support or nominate a “successor advisor.”

Organizations dedicated to liberty gained enormously. Whitney was able to advance a free society while helping donors fulfill their wishes. Explains DT, it seeks “to help alleviate, through education, research, and private initiative, society’s most pervasive and radical needs, including those relating to social welfare, health, the environment, economics, governances, foreign relations, and arts and culture; and to encourage philanthropy and individual giving and responsibility, as opposed to government involvement, as an answer to society’s needs.”

Adam Meyerson, another long-time activist who currently heads the Philanthropy Roundtable, explained that Whitney “was also one of those rare CEOs to combine entrepreneurial energy with a passionate focus on detail, a big-picture vision with careful attention to legal and financial compliance.” James Piereson, president of the William E. Simon Foundation, called her “a visionary leader, a dedicated and reliable colleague, and a cherished friend to many.”

Despite her serious endeavors, she had a whimsical streak. She liked cows, for instance, and incorporated them in her home décor. She demonstrated notable self-control in halting at cow kitchenware rather than making the jump, as I did in other areas, to pricier and more serious antiques.

Unfortunately, very serious was the breast cancer which struck in 2001. She accepted the pain, inconvenience, and uncertainty with extraordinary grace and good humor. She joked about her loss of hair and wearing a wig and dispassionately described the side-effects of chemotherapy. But she never quit and she emerged victorious. At least, as victorious as one ever can be against that horrid disease.

The cancer returned, more virulent than ever, which she fought with as much tenacity and cheerfulness as before. The wig was back, along with her mordant wisecracks to accompany even the experimental treatments with all too often ugly consequences. When we chatted a couple months back she was in the hospital where even her family had to don surgical garb to protect her battered immune system. Yet she was upbeat, funny, and determined to get out and back to work.

Alas, it was not to be. At least she ultimately was able to return from the hospice to her home. She fought to the end, dying at a far, far too young age of 52.

Whitney's life is one that truly mattered. The freedom movement was more vibrant because of her efforts. The lives of her friends and family were much enriched because of her presence. Her death reminds us how easy it is to take those around us for granted. We only realize how badly we miss them when they leave us. So it is with Whitney. Now finally rest in peace, and in a much better place.

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