

# The Freedom to Decide

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 turns 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 young wife. Up 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—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 all Cato Sponsors, becomes wary.

Two years later, Joe was back from Germany with his wife, Josephine, eventually raising their three children in suburban Chicago. Joe became a civil engineer, graduating from the University of Illinois—Chicago

and designing storm sewers for the City of Chicago. He 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.

Today, Joe is partnering with Cato to advance the philosophy of libertarianism and our shared belief in the dignity of the individual. He has a particular passion for school choice, and especially enjoyed the release of *School, Inc.* in 2017. We were glad that in December Joe could join us at Cato Club Naples for the first time and meet Cato's leadership and scholars in person.

Earlier this year Joe decided that, in addition to his annual contributions to Cato, naming Cato as the beneficiary of a specially created IRA was an opportunity to make a significant contribution to our fight for freedom. "I'm so proud and happy to support Cato's work," Joe says. ■



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