



Julie Borowski: Token Libertarian Girl

Guest: Julie Borowski

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Julie Borowski is a policy analyst for FreedomWorks.

WOODS: I find your whole career absolutely fascinating, because you basically came out of nowhere. All of a sudden, boom, you're producing these videos. You get a gazillion subscribers, you get a lot of views. You've got a whole bunch of likes on Facebook. It seems to me like the old-fashioned American story of sheer hard work. You just started doing it. I want to discuss how you did it a little later. But I want to start off with a little autobiography on your part. You weren't always the person you are now in terms of the views that you hold. Maybe you might give us a little story of how you came to be who you are today.

BOROWSKI: Sure. Thank you for saying that about me, Tom. That's very nice of you. Actually, growing up, I considered myself to be a conservative. Looking back, I was probably more of a neoconservative, because my personality—I've always been all or nothing. My parents are Republican—not super Republican, but they would talk about issues at the dinner table. I decided that I was a conservative Republican, and that's what I was. I was a huge supporter of Bob Dole when I was about eight years old, which was embarrassing. But I definitely supported George W. Bush back in high school. And suddenly, I just realized that George W. Bush wasn't the limited-government, small-government person that he thought he was, and I started to doubt especially the wars that were going on at the time in Afghanistan and Iraq. I was on an online forum, and somebody said the word "libertarian," and I had never heard that word before. I Googled it, and the definition said, "People that want maximum freedom." And I started looking into it more, and I said whoa, that's me. I was about 15 years old. I didn't really get active in the liberty movement until I was 18, in 2007, when I found out about this guy named Ron Paul. I guess the rest is history from there.

WOODS: Was there any particular issue that was tricky for you to get on board with? There's usually something, one or two things, where you feel like you like the package but that particular ribbon you're not sure you care for.

BOROWSKI: I would say foreign policy was a big issue for me. As I said, I started to have doubts, but truly when I was 13 or 14 years old—it sounds silly, because I was so young—but I was very hardcore into the wars. I remember having debates in my classroom, my history classroom about the wars, and I thought anyone that opposed the wars hated America. They were sissies. They couldn't stand for anything. Now looking back, it's ridiculous. That was probably one of the things that took me a while to finally get and realize that neoconservative foreign policy was really big-government foreign policy. It wasn't small government. It wasn't conservative at all.

WOODS: So you came to that realization. You live in the D.C. area?

BOROWSKI: Yes.

WOODS: And is it okay to mention your employer?

BOROWSKI: Sure. I work for FreedomWorks. I'm a policy analyst there.

WOODS: And of course nothing you say implicates them. These are your own private views. Is there somebody who's making the videos for you? Is there somebody doing the camera work? Or is that all you?

BOROWSKI: No. I do absolutely everything myself from writing, obviously I'm in the videos, to editing. I actually kept my videos a secret for a while at work, because I thought they were terrible. I thought the production quality was really bad. It's all completely something that I do basically on the weekends by myself in my apartment.

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WOODS: Isn't that something? Because I haven't seen maybe the first few videos that you did, but obviously it got to a point where you learned how to do them. You learned video editing. You learned how to get it looking right the first time and all that. So now I guess you're probably now reasonably pleased with the quality of the videos, right?

BOROWSKI: Pretty much. It took me a long time, because I'm not an expert at technology whatsoever. There were so many problems of figuring out lighting. I just figured out white balance, which is completely a beginner thing, so it took me a while to find out what worked. A lot of people ask how do I start a YouTube channel? I don't really know that much about video cameras, making videos. You really don't have to at first, because you definitely learn as you go. You don't have to be an expert at it.

WOODS: No, that's true, and I bet you if you were to do just a simple Google search, you would find all kinds of sites that will give you the basics, the introductory stuff. I happen to like the work of a guy named Bill Myers. He has a site bmyers.com where he gives you all the answers to all the questions you would want. What kind of equipment do I need? How high quality does it have to be? What kind of lights do I need? But your stuff, I just figured FreedomWorks was doing this for you.

BOROWSKI: Oh, no.

WOODS: So you've gotten to the point where it looks really good. I look back to my early videos, and I think, oh, my gosh. It's all wrong looking. Whereas now I can produce a pretty good quality video. And of course, it matters. A lot of people will sit there in front of their laptop with their little webcam built in the computer, and they'll go talking about some issue that matters to them. It's really sweet that they want to convey their thoughts to the world, but just that extra \$50 and the extra 20 minutes to make it look good gives you that added credibility, don't you think?

BOROWSKI: Yeah, I would say so, but in the beginning you are basically learning what to do. It's funny that you say that about my videos, because I use a cat tower—you know, the things that cats sit on—as my tripod. I have a pretty cheap video camera, and I just film myself. Sometimes I'm just against a wall in my apartment talking, so it's not professional quality. It's just me, and I think that's what people like about the videos. At least I think so. I'm being genuine. It's just me.

WOODS: I agree completely. How do you account for how rapidly you zoomed up in terms of number of subscribers and videos? I would think it's partly—I mean, let's face it, there aren't that many women in the libertarian movement.

BOROWSKI: Yeah.

WOODS: But it can't just be that, because there are plenty of women who do make videos. Let me tell you what my theory is. My theory is that in addition to the fact that you've kept the videos short—people don't like to watch half-hour videos—you have really mastered social media. And that is an explosive combination. What do you attribute it to?

BOROWSKI: If we're being honest, I would say part of it is that I'm a woman. I can't deny that. There's a lack of women in the liberty movement. But I think that's just part of it. I think if people watch my videos and I was a woman, but I wasn't saying anything important, they would tune out and not watch the videos anymore. I've tried to make them entertaining and funny, and sometimes they're completely over the top. That's what really works on YouTube. I watch other libertarian channels, and some are very boring and they use a lot of jargon. They're not really appealing to someone that's not that interested in politics, so what I've tried to do is make them funny and make them entertaining. A lot of people message me and say, "I don't agree with you on pretty much anything. But I like watching your videos, because you're kind of crazy." That's okay as long as I'm getting the message across. I've also tried to engage with people on YouTube and Facebook, and I ask a lot of people questions. I try to respond to the comments. I respond to comments on YouTube. I try to make it kind of a community.

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WOODS: That is key. I watch the way people who are really skilled at Facebook. The Tenth Amendment Center is a great example. Michael Boldin has built that thing up to over 120,000 likes, and he's just one guy. But he learned how to do it. And one of the ways to do it, of course, is to do exactly what you're doing. To encourage the idea that, hey, you all belong to something and I, the host of this page, am part of that. I notice that you ask a lot of questions, and people want to respond to that and you jump in. That's an essential ingredient for making Facebook work.

You've got to be careful, because on Facebook you're inclined to link to articles and link to blog posts, which the Facebook algorithm doesn't really like. They say they're trying to make that work better in the newsfeed, but in the newsfeed it seems like videos and graphic memes are what really get people's attention. Are you doing a lot of that?

BOROWSKI: I obviously post my videos. But I don't want my Facebook just to be like, this is what I think on this topic, because who wants to hear my opinions all the time? So I try to give them questions people can really engage in. One thing I've also noticed from media is people love to talk about themselves. I think that's just really human nature, but if you give a question people just love hey this is what I think on this topic. They want to tell you their opinion on something, so it's really fun and engaging.

WOODS: You mean libertarians want to tell you their opinion on something? How about that.

BOROWSKI: Can you believe it?

WOODS: You had a recent video on sanctions on Iran. What were the basic arguments that you made?

BOROWSKI: I just talked about the sanctions. I didn't really talk about the whole situation over there, because I think that's probably a longer video. A lot of people think sanctions hurt dictators, and they try to influence policy, but they really don't. Sanctions just hurt regular people in other countries, and they make people starve. One of the things I've noticed is the unintended consequence of sanctions. It gives a dictator somewhat of a scapegoat. They can say the reason why you don't have food is because of the United States. The United States is the problem. People aren't inclined to try to overthrow the dictator. They blame the United States for all their problems. Really sanctions do create more enemies, so if you want to be safe, definitely sanctions are not the option.

WOODS: Seems like Cuba's a classic example of exactly what you just described.

BOROWSKI: Yeah. Why? It's so silly in this day and age. Why is there still sanction on Cuba? Why can't I travel to Cuba?

WOODS: Right, and of course, it allowed that dirtbag Castro to claim that the problems you're all suffering

from are because of the terrible Yankees, as opposed to the crummy economic system I've imposed on you poor souls.

Before we spoke today you sent me some stuff that you've done. I like your Seven Popular Misconceptions about Libertarians. What would you say are the top three that you encounter constantly?

BOROWSKI: Top three misconceptions about libertarians? My audience is also conservatives—which is actually really good, because I don't like to preach to the choir. I like to engage other people. So one of the things I hear a lot in the comments sections is that libertarians are a bunch of potheads. They just want to legalize pot, and they want to smoke all day. That's a misconception. Yeah, there are some libertarians that like to smoke pot, but personally I'm not one of them. I don't like marijuana at all. So really, libertarian philosophy just says that people should be free to put whatever they want into their own bodies. Of course, people have to face the consequences of that action. Sometimes people don't make the best decisions. They have to live with those decisions, and also the war on drugs is expensive. I don't want to pay to put a felon in jail for smoking pot peacefully in their basement. So that's a big misconception.

Another misconception, definitely big during the Ron Paul campaign, is that libertarians are isolationists. That one would just drive me crazy, every time I saw an article with the word "isolationist" in it. Most libertarians, most consistent libertarians, are non-interventionists, which means basically free trade, free travel, all that stuff. What really isolates people from the rest of the world is bombing and killing innocent people. That's going to create some enemies and isolates you.

Another one probably is more liberals saying this is that libertarians love big corporations. Which is silly, because libertarians just support the free market. The free market's hard for a business. We don't want the government giving any business any special privilege. We oppose government handouts to business, any government protection to business, so really the free market is sink or swim. We don't support corporations.

WOODS: What I find funny about this, number one, is that if we really were such big supporters or corporations how come they don't donate to us?

BOROWSKI: Yes.

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WOODS: Why do the corporations always want to throw their money at the mainstream candidates? Then take Rachel Maddow, the cover girl for progressives. She was all for the bailouts, because we needed that to save the economy. Wait a minute. How come she is the great defender of the common man, and you and I are the plutocratic supporters of the corporations? I don't quite get it.

Let me ask something that comes to mind, though, especially because you are in D.C. The question naturally arises about your view on politics. Libertarians are divided on this. I think libertarians as a group are not as anti-politics as we might think. The group of libertarians who are extremely anti-politics happen to be extremely loud. I don't mean that in a bad way. But they express their opinion forcefully and repeatedly, so you think there are more of them than there are. And I understand completely all the arguments against getting involved in politics and how corrupting it is. I understand and have absorbed that. What is your own view on the subject of politics? Should we be getting involved in it, and if so, do you see any bright spots on the horizon?

BOROWSKI: I always feel uncomfortable with telling libertarians what to do. If they want to get involved in politics, that's fine. If they want to do more education, that's fine, or if they just want to opt out of the system and move to New Hampshire. But personally, I am somewhat involved in politics. My videos have taken more of an educational approach for the past year, but really my idea is I want to get the government

out of people's lives as quickly as possible. I believe that politics is a good route for that, because when I look at it I'm in D.C. I've lived in the area all my life. It's a miracle if government even slashed spending, let alone just completely disappeared from our lives. I'm so focused on those short-term goals that are winnable in the near future as opposed to just completely thrown off the grid I suppose.

WOODS: What are some of the areas where you think there's a possibility for some kind of rollback of the government? Some kind of short-term victory, as you say? What kind of areas seem to be low-hanging fruit?

BOROWSKI: I think a lot of people are waking up to a couple of different things. I'm reading right now on legalizing marijuana in Colorado—which was a good thing, though they're taxed way too high. Even *National Review* has come out and said legalizing marijuana is a good thing. I think even conservatives are saying, yeah, why not? Why is marijuana illegal in those places? So that's one area.

A lot of people are concerned about civil liberties right now. I don't think it's a Republican or Democrat thing. I think most people are saying the NSA's completely out of control. I don't want them to be spying on me. That's one issue that I would say people are waking up to. When you look at what happened in the Syrian war, I don't think that would have happened a couple of years ago. Really it was like you said with the NSA. It wasn't a Republican or Democrat issue. Most people completely opposed the war in Syria, and we actually stopped that. That was amazing. So I think people are waking up to a couple of different things. Hopefully, it'll get even better in the future.

WOODS: I've said on this program several times that the Syria thing really surprised me, because it seems to be a pattern of the past I don't know how many years in which some foreign-policy item appears in the news, and before you know it, within a month there's a war going on or there's a bombing campaign going on. It seems unstoppable. You have this sense of dreary predictability of how it's all going to turn out, and then, as you say, this spontaneous and completely unexpected popular opposition to it. But do you think if that had been George W. Bush they would have said let's go ahead and bomb Syria?

BOROWSKI: I'm not sure. I think part of it was definitely anti-Obama: Obama wants war in Syria, so that's bad because he's Obama. I actually think a lot was [indiscernible] influence within people, saying these wars are a bad thing. People are actually saying what's national security interest in Syria, which is something they didn't really do in Iraq and Afghanistan. A lot of Democrats are still against the wars even though they haven't been exactly protesting them. I think they still have that tendency to say, well, this is a bad thing.

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WOODS: My view is that since we're stuck with Obama, we might as well take this opportunity and think of it as a pedagogical moment. We can get through to some of these Tea Party people by saying look, this certain thing that Obama was proposing to do was bad in and of itself. It was bad not because Obama proposed it, but it was just bad. It would have been bad if anybody else had done it. So this has been one silver lining—these people, for example, have been more likely to consider outside-the-mainstream approaches like nullification than they would otherwise have done. They feel like the guy in the White House is a bad guy, and he's not our friend. I wish they would have that view all the time, because basically practically anybody who's going to get to the White House is going to be a bad guy and going to be not your friend.

All right, let me ask you this: if you had to narrow it down to three people who have influenced you the most, the way you think, and we exclude Ron Paul, so I'm going to make it harder.

BOROWSKI: No.

WOODS: Thirty-three percent harder, okay? It would be very sweet if you mentioned my name, so I'm going

to exclude myself, since I want you to be honest. Who would those people be?

BOROWSKI: Well, definitely, Tom Woods.

WOODS: Get out of here. That's disqualified. Who else?

BOROWSKI: Seriously, I remember watching a YouTube video with you a couple years ago, and you were explaining how you used to be more conservative and the war had kind of changed you. That was really powerful—not to suck up or anything, but that's really the truth. Three people? Definitely my grandfather. He's not a famous person, but he definitely instilled the values of hard work into me. Another person—all the libertarian philosophers, Hayek, Mises, Rothbard. I think you know Bill Anderson from Frostburg State University?

WOODS: You were a student of his?

BOROWSKI: Yes, I was a student of his. I took a couple of economics classes with him.

WOODS: Get out. That's great.

BOROWSKI: That was wonderful, because I was a political science major. All the political science teachers, most of them, are pretty liberal, so it was great to go to Dr. Anderson's class and not be brainwashed with all that stuff.

WOODS: Right. Well, that's great. What would be the advice you would give to somebody who comes up to you and says you know, I'm not sure I'm on board with you completely, but I am intrigued. I want to know what my entry point into these ideas is. What would you recommend that person do next?

BOROWSKI: I love those people. I get those messages a lot. I would just say a lot of people ask me what's the one book that I should read to learn about libertarian philosophy. I always say *Economics in One Lesson*. That's such a simple book to read, and it really covers pretty much all economics, the basics at least. But I would say Cato Institute, Mises, all these resources are really online. A lot of libertarians I talk to are always like: you young people are so lucky—you have the Internet these days, and there's so much information out there. So really just using it. I just ask them what they're most concerned about, and I try to see where they're coming from. I try to put a libertarian spin on that.

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WOODS: I think that is the best way to go. I wanted to ask you this earlier, so before I let you go I want to know: of all the videos you've done is there one that in terms of the number of views vastly outpaced all the rest?

BOROWSKI: There's one video that went somewhat viral. It has I guess 300,000 views now. I don't know if you remember, but Lena Dunham—she's an actress, she has the HBO show *Girls*—she did an Obama ad called "My First Time." You remember that?

WOODS: So you did one. I consider 300,000 for a libertarian video to be super viral.

BOROWSKI: If someone listening doesn't know what I'm talking about, she compared voting for Obama to losing her virginity, which is really gross, so I made a parody video basically poking fun at it. And I was amazed. Before that, my audience was pretty much all libertarians, which is to be expected, but all of a sudden some of my videos started being shared on more mainstream conservative websites. I said I can actually reach out and spread the message of non-libertarians. That was amazing. I couldn't believe that happened to me.

WOODS: That's nice. You can never tell. I'll make a video and think: people are going to love this one. And it

sinks without a trace. Then I make what seems to me to be a run-of-the-mill one, and everyone loves it. I can't figure people out, but that's the marketplace for you. If people want to follow you online what's the easiest way for them to do that?

BOROWSKI: My YouTube channel is [YouTube.com/TokenLibertarianGirl](https://www.youtube.com/TokenLibertarianGirl). Twitter Julie Borowski, Facebook Julie Borowski, you can find me there.

WOODS: You don't have a single website that brings all this stuff together? Maybe you should.

BOROWSKI: I don't know how to do that. I do everything on my own. I don't know how to create a website.

WOODS: Well, me either. The division of labor. I hire people to do it one time, and then I don't touch it. I appreciate your taking this time. I was just saying to my wife the other night, "I've got to make sure I have something interesting to talk to Julie about. There's so many things I want to ask her, and I don't know if my audience cares as much as I do about things like YouTube and Facebook and social media." But when I encounter somebody who's a real master of it like you and Michael Boldin I just want to talk shop the whole time. I've got to be careful not to do that. I'm really excited about how you've done, and as I said just really coming out of nowhere. All of a sudden you just started making the videos. And you just kept on doing it and kept on doing it and then all of a sudden you've built a following for yourself. In this sort of world, where you can't expect to follow the traditional kind of career path that people used to follow, which is I go to school, and then I just fit into a cookie cutter sort of career. That just doesn't work anymore, and you basically have entrepreneurially built up something for yourself. People ought to imitate that if they can. Anyway, Julie I've really appreciated your being with me here today. Thanks so much.

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