

On Principle



Hi, my name is Sylla McClellan; I'm 33 today, and I live in McMinnville, Oregon, and I own a bookstore. You know, I think that as a small business owner, I mean, I was so shocked how easy it was to get things going. I mean, and I don't know if that's just because I had experience working for other businesses, I thought it all out pretty well but, you know, I didn't do tons of research. I just sort of, I just sort of winged it. And it worked. And I so encourage other people, if they're thinking about it, to just try it. And of course, yes, there is a possibility that you might lose your shirt, but that risk exists in just living. And I also think that the part of the American dream is to take those risks and not be held as a pariah if you fail.

I used to think that if you worked hard enough you could achieve it. And I still believe that up to a point. But I also have become aware of there are people that, that work all the time, 24/7, that are really, really hard workers, and they still are not able to achieve a certain stability economically. I think the reality is that all men are not created equal, that people are not created equal, and part of that is just our history—the country's history is that we established that, and I think that history has affected us to this day. And even as a modern society, I mean, it's still not equal. The big joke is Martha Stewart. What did she do? Well, okay, she lied and she'd gone to prison and she's doing her penance. But really and truly if she'd been a man it wouldn't have been made into such a big deal.

One thing that I think is part of, I think it's what I've been exposed to as part of the American ideal is, you know, you work and you go to school and you're successful and then you move on, you have a family and, you know, there's sort of the nuclear image, and part of what I love about America is that we are now free, that we don't have to follow that set path.

In Europe, a lot of schools, you know, by the time you're in sixth grade you're supposed to decide what you want to do when you grow up. Geez, you know, I didn't decide until I was 25, and I just think how many people just end up in these positions or jobs or situations where they're unhappy. In America,

that individual freedom to go and to make mistakes and to move on and to learn from those mistakes—or you also have the freedom to follow that tract and stick with it.

One of the beauties of America that the education system exists and it is, in theory, for all, but the sad part is that—it just blows me away how expensive college is nowadays, and you really do have to start planning—before you even have children you have to start saving the money, you know. And I love the ideas of these programs that exist where you put money aside in IRA's and, you know, it's untouchable; it's specifically for the college education of your children. But again, for a lot of people, they need that money now; they need to survive now.

I think that's part of what makes America tick, actually, is the huge level of volunteerism. I have to say this is the first community that I've ever lived in where the rate of volunteerism is as high as it is. I mean, *everybody* is involved in at least one thing here, and it just blows my mind. And either its with their, it's a religious affiliation, or it's a reading program, or Habitat for Humanity, or a very small program, or developing the downtown. It's just—that was a real eye-opener for me. It's certainly what makes McMinnville tick.

On a political bent for me, really, that's really important to me is the individual freedom for a woman's right to choose, and that is something that I've never felt more strongly about than I do now. And I will fly to D.C. and stand if it means getting the right justice on the Supreme Court. I have two daughters, and so that is even that much more critical to me.

I also think about the liberties that we have that are not available in other countries. And for me right now, the most important one is the ability to vote. And I've been determined to become more involved in the voting and voting rights and just that a lot of people say, "Well, each voice doesn't count," but I also think, well, that's, so many places don't have that ability, and we do, and we shouldn't just chuck it out the window because we feel like it doesn't matter.

I mean, here we are: we are *the* first world country, and we can't even have a decent election? And we're setting the standard for places that we're invading? I mean, geez, you know, something seems fundamentally wrong with that. I mean, I don't know. I don't know what the answer is.