



Episode 1,501: How I Talk to My Progressive Friends, and More with Marc Clair

Guest: Marc Clair

WOODS: I can't believe that, even though I have aired my appearance on your program on this podcast, I've never had you as a guest. Shame, shame, everybody knows your name.

CLAIR: Well, you've got to build it up. You always want to save your better guests for later on in the run, so that's what I always presumed you were doing.

WOODS: That's true. Now, this being Episode 1501, the first 1500 episodes were all the deadbeats.

CLAIR: Right, right, that was the buildup.

WOODS: Now we get serious people. That was building up to 1501.

CLAIR: Now we're going to get serious about this podcasting thing.

WOODS: [laughing] That's right. So I've been on with you, which is the *Lions of Liberty* podcast, as I just told people. And I want to do a little background with you. And I think you've been doing really good work, and we have certainly a lot of overlap in our audiences. And of course, every time I have a podcaster on and we talk about their podcast, I think I'm diminishing my own audience every time I do this [laughing]. But, look, there's plenty to go around. The water's warm. We're all doing good work in our own way. So let's get started here with your own background. So first of all, where do you come from, both geographically and philosophically, initially?

CLAIR: Sure. I was raised on the East Coast of the US. I was born in Buffalo, New York, and then when I was eight years old, my family moved to Connecticut. And that was where I pretty much was until I went to Penn State for college, which is sort of where the *Lions of Liberty* formed, and we can kind of circle back to that. But I was raised in what you might call, I guess, a fairly standard, small-government-Republican household. I wasn't super into politics when I was growing up, but I always remember being in the car with my father, and he would always have one of two things: either '50s doo-wop music or political talk radio. So I was very familiar with Rush, Hannity, that sort of thing. And I can't say I developed very strong opinions at that time, but I do remember always thinking to myself and oftentimes even asking my dad like, the questions like: why should this be a law? Why did he say this? And if I didn't like the answer I got, I would always just continue to ask more and more questions until I kind of got to what I thought was the truth or maybe as close to the truth as I

was going to get. So maybe this interview thing was sort of in me from the beginning in some ways.

WOODS: All right, so what year was it when you — I hate to date people, but when you went off to Penn State?

CLAIR: Oh, that is okay. So this was actually the late '90s when I went to Penn State. It was 1998, so you can all do the math at home about my age.

WOODS: Okay, all right, because when you were saying — I was thinking maybe you were much, much younger than I thought.

CLAIR: Sure, I get that a lot when people hear that we were inspired by Ron Paul, but it's kind of funny, because I actually heard about Ron Paul long before he ran for president.

WOODS: Me too, yeah. Yeah, the cool people already knew who he was.

CLAIR: Exactly. That's why I made it on 1501, because I was one of the OGs on this Ron Paul thing.

WOODS: [laughing] You are an OG.

CLAIR: Right, but I first heard about Ron Paul from a college friend; his name's Howie Snowden, and he's currently one of the contributors to our podcast. And at the time, we became friends in college, we were in the same fraternity, and as people in fraternities sometimes do, we would drink very late in the night. And whenever politics or something like that would come up, he would always come circling back to talking about this congressman, this guy Ron Paul, because when he was in high school, my friend Howie served as a congressional page for, I don't even know who, some Pennsylvania congressman. But he used to always talk about this Ron Paul guy. He would always make sure he was there when he gave these speeches. He would go into his office sometimes and sit with him and talk to him about this libertarian thing. And I didn't really know much about it, but his passion for Ron Paul, the things he was talking about kind of caused me to say, okay, well, maybe there's something to this if he'll just never shut up about this guy.

So eventually, I started reading Ron Paul's column, which was called *Texas Straight Talk* at the time. And that really stood out to me, because, especially from growing up in a Republican household, I found that Ron Paul was most often criticizing other Republicans, even though he was another Republican. And that just blew my mind, because that was not the way politics worked at all. It was very, very clearly defined. Democrats criticize Republicans, Republicans criticize Democrats, and that's how we went along. You would never criticize the same side. But Ron Paul seemed to always be going after Republican positions. This was I think, at this point, probably during the beginnings of the Bush administration. He was criticizing the Patriot Act. He was criticizing the wars. He was criticizing the war on drugs. All things you just never expected a Republican to be talking about.

So just that idea alone, even before I really developed that into sort of a libertarian outlook, I was just blown away by the fact that this person was speaking clearly from his heart, clearly

sincerely, not trying to cater to any one side. He was just willing to criticize anyone that he saw doing wrong, which was really both parties when it came to government.

WOODS: Well, it sounds to me like you grew up in a household fairly similar to mine, right, because I got what would today be considered a fairly conventional Republican outlook. But I don't look back at that and say that was a stupid waste of my time, by any means, because I did learn some important things. I think my father helped stop me from becoming a leftist, and that was step one. At least I got that part. I don't have to learn absolutely everything from him, but I got that. And that at least got me in a position where I was willing to listen to people who had voices that were different from the mainstream.

CLAIR: Right.

WOODS: And then I went a little bit farther than he was willing to go from that point. But there's this situation where you can't teach — you can, I suppose, but it's tricky to teach your own father what he's supposed to believe. That's the opposite of the natural order of things. So he was interested in where I was going with things, to be sure, but I'm the son, he's the father, and it's a little bit tricky. I mean, I know a lot of people who have major, major, major family dissension over stuff like this, and thank heavens I haven't had that kind of situation. I assume you haven't either?

CLAIR: Sure. Well, it actually reminds me of a little story, because right when I really got excited about Ron Paul, I mean, I was excited about his ideas, but when he announced his run for president, I got really excited. I couldn't even believe this guy was running for president. I didn't think he had any chance, but just the fact that this guy whose column I had been reading for the last eight or nine years or so was going to be running for president, I just found that exciting, because it's kind of like when a niche band that no one's ever heard of that you follow suddenly signs to a big record label or something like that. Maybe that's not the best analogy. But just finally, knowing that many more people were probably going to hear this guy's name and maybe be exposed to his ideas was really exciting.

So I was really what you might call one of those annoying Ron Paul people when things first started happening, and his videos started going viral. I was even sharing them on MySpace back in the day, just to date myself even more there. But I sent my dad one of those videos, and it was I think one when he was criticizing foreign policy. And I think he was comparing us staying in Iraq forever to Vietnam, somehow. And my father is a Vietnam veteran, and he took issue with the comparison. He just kind of sent me a quick message back that said, you know, *Hold on to your money. You don't want to send this guy any money. It would be a waste of your time and money. It's a stupid analogy, comparing it to Vietnam.* And that was kind of it. I kind of let it go for a minute.

But I didn't stop promoting. I didn't stop talking about Ron Paul. And let's say, eventually, it came around to my father being a Ron Paul donor and eventually even donating to Peter Schiff when he ran for Senate in Connecticut. So I think I won him over to some extent.

WOODS: All right, okay, that is pretty good story. So you have a podcast, *Lions of Liberty*. It's a different format from mine, because you have multiple people and different kinds of segments, and you're much more creative than I am in that respect. But sometimes people want to know not just libertarian stuff, but sometimes they want to know a little bit about the behind the scenes and like the meta question of podcasting itself. And you've been very

successful as a podcaster. You're certainly one of the top libertarian podcasts out there. Now, I realize I'm damning you with faint praise when I say that.

CLAIR: I will take it. Please, faint praise is a wonderful thing.

WOODS: Right, it's better than no praise at all. But you're definitely one of the people I think of as being a top libertarian podcaster.

CLAIR: I'll take that as more than faint praise.

WOODS: Oh, okay, thank you. It was so intended. How did that get started? And I will also say, I think the key thing is a lot of people, so they start in podcasting, whether it's libertarian or otherwise, and they get discouraged. And by episode seven or eight or nine, they're just not doing it anymore. And the key thing is you have to be consistent and persistent.

CLAIR: Yes. Yeah, I think the stat that I often hear is the average podcast lasts about seven episodes.

WOODS: I've heard that too, yeah. I've heard that too.

CLAIR: And as you know, I mean, a big reason for that is because once you get into podcasting, I mean, there's no immediate reward, for the most part. Maybe if you're super famous, maybe if Tom Cruise started a podcast, it might be profitable on day one. But even he would have to put in the work to build up a podcast audience, because podcasting, especially now — I mean, when I started *Lions of Liberty* six years ago, this may be really hard to believe, Tom, but there were hardly any libertarian podcasts. That's why I started it, because I just couldn't really find any. I had become very addicted to podcasts, and I listened to podcasts about all sorts of things, and I would listen to podcasts when I'd walk my dogs or when I'd do work. I mean, I found myself listening to podcasts all day, and I just couldn't find that much libertarian content. This is back in September of 2013 when I first started the show. And you know, Lew Rockwell had his podcast. He did some interviews —

WOODS: Wait, stop for a minute. Stop for a minute. You started your show in September 2013?

CLAIR: Believe it or not, yep.

WOODS: That is exactly when I started this show, September of 2013.

CLAIR: Well, yeah, and I was going to get there, because it was right as I was coming up with this idea, we already had started the website *Lions of Liberty* with Brian McWilliams, John Odermatt, and our other friend Dom. They would all go on to help start the podcast, as well. But at that point, we were just writing articles. We started off as basically a Ron Paul propaganda website during the 2012 campaign, and eventually, we shifted more into diving into philosophy and that sort of thing. But really, I loved listening to podcasts. I wanted to find more libertarian podcasts. Couldn't find them, so I said, *You know what? Screw it. I'll just start one.* And my idea was, okay, I'm going to be the libertarian interview podcast. You're going to be able to show up and always find these interviews, each and every week, at the

same time. And then I look up, and I see this Woods guy is starting a podcast, and he's doing it five days a week. So I said, *All right, maybe I won't be the libertarian podcast* [laughing]. But it didn't stop me. It actually inspired me a little bit too, seeing that you were starting with five days a week. I said, *All right. If this guy Tom Woods can pump out five of these a week, surely I can do one.*

WOODS: Yeah, there you go. That's how I want to inspire people, by being absurdly unreasonable in the content I produce, so they think, at least I can do something if this schmuck is doing five episodes a week. Tell me about your mini documentary. This is exciting. I should be doing something like this if I weren't such a lazy bum.

CLAIR: You definitely should. And guess what, Tom: we're kind of lazy bums, too, which is why we hardly did any of the work on this. We were lucky enough to connect with someone who I just have to name drop because his work is so much. His name is Dan Smotz. And this is one of the cool things about podcasting. Our relationship with Dan started a few years ago, when suddenly we would make a joke on the show or come up with sort of a meme idea. And we're not really graphic designers, we wouldn't create this stuff, but Dan would just start shooting us these memes or like little funny graphics from shows we were doing, from little inside jokes we'd make. So that's how we kind of started talking to him. And he does really incredible work. He has his own production company called Goulash Films.

And eventually, we decided to sort of make a deal with him, because we wanted to go back to PorcFest this year. We went last year, had an amazing time. It's really an experience. For those that don't know, it's the Porcupine Freedom Fest put on by the Free State Project in New Hampshire. And just meeting other libertarians and meeting people in a real environment outside of more than just being pixels on Twitter or a download number and really putting faces to names was just such an incredible experience. But we really wanted to do even more with it when we went back this year, and we really wanted to create some kind of piece of media that was easily shareable, high quality, and could really show people not only why it's great to go to an event like PorcFest, because it's something we really wanted to support, but also kind of shows some people, I guess, the other side of us, that we're just real people like you guys, we're just regular dudes who do a lot of the same regular-dude things that other people do; we just happen to have started this podcast and have worked really hard to grow it to what it's become.

So we decided to bring Dan along, and essentially we made a deal with him where he would come along, and he would just shoot footage of us, and he would produce a mini documentary. And that was basically the entire premise. We didn't dig much deeper into that. So a lot of the creativity behind it, I have to say most of it, really goes to Dan. He was just constantly filming us. He sort of did some candidate interviews with us that I wasn't even thinking about as an interview at the time. He was just sort of talking to me in the car from the airport. He did the same thing with John, just asking us about our journey to starting the podcast. So really, this documentary – and I should say mini documentary, because it's about 15 minutes long. Nobody needs a two-hour feature-length film about how the *Lions of Liberty* came together. We wanted something that was very sort of a concise, easily sharable, everyone could take 15 minutes out of their day, no big deal. Not a huge commitment. But yeah, he basically put this together, sort of weaving our narratives of how we came together as the *Lions of Liberty*, interspersed with footage of us coming back together at PorcFest.

And that's one amazing thing that's been just fantastic about being a podcaster for me, because we were sent to PorcFest entirely using money from our Patreon supporters, from fans of the show who support us. And it's really helped me keep in touch with my friends more. I mean, only one of the other contributors to *Lions of Liberty*, that's Brian McWilliams — he hosts our Wednesday show called "Electric Liberty Land," and he's the only other one that lives in Los Angeles where I live right now. The other host, John Odermatt, he lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and he hosts "Felony Friday." That's our very important criminal justice show. And we also have several contributors that live in various parts of the country. And these are all people I've been friends with for 20 years, so now I'm at a point where I have people, fans of the show who like what we do so much, that they send us money so I can go party with my friends in the woods [laughing]. I mean, that's just the coolest thing ever.

And the fact that we can do that while producing this great content that hopefully will inspire more people to pursue their passions in spreading these ideas, I mean, that's really the main crux of everything we do. Whether it's the podcast, or whether it's producing this mini documentary, we just really want to inspire more people to be passionate, to be bold, to speak about these ideas in whatever way comes to them the best, the same way Ron Paul inspired all of us to speak out through his bravery and standing up on the stage, being made fun of, saying things that you just didn't say in politics, being called a traitor, being called un-American. The fact that he could stand there and not only take that, but continued to be bold in his beliefs, and do so all with a smile, I mean, that was just so incredibly inspiring to us. And that's the same kind of attitude that we put into everything we do.

WOODS: You said something in there that I want to follow up on, about being in Los Angeles.

CLAIR: [laughing] Yes.

WOODS: And here's the question that a lot of people face. A lot of people do live in a milieu where there isn't a whole lot of sympathy for what we have to say. And yet you have to interact with people who disagree with you profoundly on a regular basis. How do you do that? Do you just keep your head down, or do you try and reach out to them? What's the right approach in your opinion?

CLAIR: Well, pre-Ron-Paul Marc, pre-2008 Marc might have just kept his head down, but this is Marc 2.0. This is the Marc that has been Ron Paulized and reborn as a Lion of Liberty. So no, I absolutely do not keep my head down. I always try to be true to my beliefs whenever I get into a political dialogue with someone.

Of course, that doesn't mean that I introduce myself as "Marc Clair of *Lions of Liberty*, the libertarian podcast. What can I tell you about how liberty will save you?" You've got to really understand where people are coming from. Especially, I've been in the dating scene recently in Los Angeles the last few months, and just kind of approaching women can be one sort of aspect of it, where you're trying to sort of woo someone, you want them to like you, but you don't want to hide your beliefs. And knowing that most females and most people overall have a very sort of progressive point of view in Los Angeles, it can make you feel a little tentative going in.

But I find that the best approach is, of course, not to hide your beliefs, not to do anything except say what they are. But there's a way you can do it, where you approach them on a topic that you're fairly certain they're going to agree with you on. And I guess that's the nice

thing about being a libertarian, is you can find a position from one side or the other that you can feel pretty confident that they'll at least sympathize with you with. So I'll often try to dig into criminal justice issues, how passionate I am about that, how it's awful that people are thrown in a cage for a plant. And I'll really just let my passion show on an issue where I think I can at least get them nodding with me. And once they're nodding with you, once they see that you're a human and you're not a monster, you're not just insensitive capitalists who wants corporations to control their lives, once they realize you're a real person that really is doing this because of your passion for people, they're a lot more likely to listen to you on other subjects.

And I have friends that, yeah, sure, the vast majority of them probably do vote Democrat, probably do identify sort of in a progressive way, but I have friends that agree with me on immigration, friends that agree with me on guns, friends that agree with me on issues here and there. And I can't necessarily expect to change everyone's complete, entire world view or philosophy, but I can sort of influence people and at least try to be the best version of a libertarian I can be, be the best person I can be. And when they see you're a human, when they see that you're someone who cares, when they see that you're someone that agrees with them on certain topics, they at least see that there's something worth listening to there. There's something worth engaging with. You're not just some monster. And you know, oftentimes maybe that's as far as you'll get with somebody, but for some people, it could be the beginnings of kind of breaking the cracks open or letting them begin down that path of thinking about things a little differently. And if I can even only do that much with some people, I mean, that's a victory too.

WOODS: Well, there's a lot of enthusiasm in there, so my question is: how do we get more Marc Clairs in the libertarian movement? How do we create more Marc Clairs?

CLAIR: Everyone has to grow their hair long. That's all it takes.

WOODS: All right, well, so that ain't happening. What else? What's the second plan?

CLAIR: I think the real thing for me, because what inspired my fellow cohosts was really just them seeing my passion in person. And whenever I get on these rants, I think when you're really passionate about something and you display that, especially when you're in person with somebody, when you're sitting next to them at the bar, tossing back drinks — back in 2008, my friend John Odermatt — he hosts "Felony Friday," once again, our criminal justice show. Possibly the most important show that we do, honestly, because he now looks — I'd say the vast majority of his episodes are interviews with people who have been through the criminal justice system. They're not necessarily libertarians, although I'm sure that after their experience in that system, they are more libertarian than they were before. But really, we see the human side of these issues, and I think that's so important, because you don't need to be a libertarian to click on "Felony Friday" and have your heart moved and realize that there's something wrong with the system, that you need to start looking at things in a different way.

But getting back to our story, when I was sitting with him when he lived out in Southern California briefly ten years ago, I went out to hang out with him at this bar. And I started ranting about being antiwar and how we've got to get out of Iraq, and this is all wrong, and we shouldn't be invading other countries. So he presumed just from that part of the conversation like, *Oh, Marc must have just moved out to Los Angeles and become this liberal, lefty hippie.* And then he asked me who I was supporting for president and I said, "Oh, this

guy, Ron Paul. He's a Republican from Texas." And I think just hearing those two things, he tells the story from his perspective all the time, it literally just kind of blew his mind open. I mean, he never had heard of a Republican who was antiwar, a Republican who was against the war on drugs. And just the fact that he found out that even existed, that started him thinking a little bit. I mean, he didn't become a libertarian overnight, but within a few months, he was holding the Ron Paul signs, as well, sending money to the money bombs, and that whole thing.

So again, I think sometimes it can really just be showing somebody something that they didn't know existed. I mean, that's the same thing that happened with me when I first read Ron Paul's "Texas Straight Talk" column. I didn't know that something existed known as a Republican who criticized Republicans. Now, that didn't make me a libertarian overnight, but it did open my mind to other ideas, and it did get me thinking and seeking out other voices that were doing the same thing. Other voices that were also speaking out against the two-party system, other voices that were also doing more than just looking at things from a left-right perspective.

So I think the way you get more Marc Clairs in the world is to try to just blow people's minds as much as possible, try to show people that there are other ways of looking at the world other than strictly the ways they've been taught. And I think this is getting maybe somewhat easier in a way, just because we have the internet now and everybody has it. And YouTube is getting big, podcasts are getting big. There's so much sort of decentralization of the way that information and opinions are disseminated now that, I mean, you almost have to go out of your way to avoid sort of alternative and dissenting points of views, whereas when I first got into this stuff, I mean, you had only heard of left and right. You had only heard of Democrats or Republicans. So I think the more people we can expose to this concept of just looking at things from a completely different way, don't look at it from left-right, look at it from the ideas of individual rights versus tyranny. I mean, look at it from completely different perspectives. When you change someone's paradigms about things, they can't help but start to look at things in a different way.

WOODS: All right, one more thing for you. As somebody who's been doing this pretty much exactly as long as I've been doing it, there are times when you wonder *What's it all for?* kind of thing.

CLAIR: Oh, yeah.

WOODS: But other times you find it very rewarding and you get great feedback. And I mean, look, every day, every weekday, I get to talk to an interesting person about interesting things. It sure beats digging ditches, as I often say, so I have no grounds for complaint. But first of all, there is more competition now. There are more libertarian podcasts than ever before, and so it is tricky to hang on to that audience. And, you know, maybe the numbers don't go as fast as you want them to and whatever. And so have there been times when you've been tempted to just throw in the towel? I mean, I'm just curious about what goes through your mind, because we're in sort of the same boat.

CLAIR: Absolutely. And as we started to go down before, podcasting is not immediately rewarding. You really have to keep at it and keep at it and keep at it. And then when your soul is completely crushed, you have to pick yourself up and say, all right, I'm going to go do

this podcast, I'm going to go record today. And that's why I think you really have to be passionate about the process. You have to actually like doing it.

And luckily, I really did enjoy doing it. I mean, one of my favorite things about podcasting from the beginning was just getting to talk to all these people that, I mean, when else when I talked to Ron Paul for 20 minutes? I don't know if I ever would have done that if I didn't have a podcast for him to come on. When else would I have talked to Jesse Ventura for 30 minutes? These are just crazy things that I never imagined happening to me, and only because I was doing a podcast did I have those opportunities. Maybe I would have ran into them at the airport somewhere, I don't know. But most likely, that was the only reason I was talking to these people that I looked up to for extended periods of time. So I really enjoyed the process.

Now, that doesn't mean that I always enjoyed the process, because as I'm sure you have experienced too, Tom, sometimes you just lose a file altogether, or sometimes — this is the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened — when you're doing 20 minutes of an interview, and you look up and you realize you have not been recording, and you now have to interrupt your guest to tell him that everything you have just done basically doesn't exist. We'll have it for the memories, but that's it. Running into things like that all the time, it can be very frustrating.

And especially if it's happening when you're not seeing the numbers go up, I mean, the numbers are not going to just skyrocket when you start a podcast. I really takes being consistent. It really takes showing up each and every single time you say you're going to be there, because like you said, there's so much competition. I mean, if I follow a podcast and suddenly an episode I expect isn't there, well, guess what: there's about 20 other podcasts in that same area that I can easily go over to. And it's very easy to lose people if you aren't being consistent. So that's really the most important thing is being consistent. But you do have to really enjoy the process, but to me, even more so than that — I mean, that was what motivated me the most in the beginning, was just enjoying having these conversations, enjoying that the editing process, the kind of thing I really do like doing.

But now, it's really seeing people that have been fans of my podcast going and starting their own projects, starting their own podcasts, advancing their careers in the political arena. I've seen so many instances of that, that it's really mind-blowing. And that really is the entire reason that I started this podcast. It's the entire reason we started *Lions of Liberty*. We wanted to inspire other people to go out there and pursue their own passion for these ideas. So the fact that I'm literally seeing people tell me, "I started this podcast, and I was inspired originally by *Lions of Liberty*," I mean, just even if just one person that, it would blow my mind. But the fact that I can think of a dozen off the top of my head, I mean, that's just amazing.

So to me, if you're going to start one, definitely, you can't be looking at any kind of reward. You can't even think about it that way. You have to just enjoy doing it, put your own passion into it. But if you do do that, if you do keep showing up, and you are really passionate about it, you are going to attract people. You are going to attract likeminded people. And if you do that, eventually, hopefully, you will inspire more people to do what you're doing, but put their own take on it. Because I know that my approach isn't going to be the best for everybody. Your approach might not be the best for everybody. But everybody has an approach that is going to affect someone else

So I want as many people as possible getting passionate, being creative, putting their own thoughts into how they can share these ideas, and going off and doing that. So I think at this point, that's by far the most rewarding thing to me about doing this, is continually meeting people that have been inspired to pursue their own passions for these ideas in their own way.

WOODS: Marc, what's your website?

CLAIR: All right, the main website is LionsofLiberty.com. We did create a little easy-to-remember URL for the documentary. The documentary is actually called *And Live Free: The Lions of Liberty Story*. That's a play on my little Spock-inspired sign off of the podcast, where I say, "Live long and live free." So the documentary is called *And Live Free*. We have a very easy URL at LionsofLiberty.com/LiveFree. Everyone knows how to use the internet. We're on Twitter. We're on Facebook, all easily find-able.

And if you do want to support the show, again, this was entirely paid for by listeners of the show by our patrons. We are on Patreon at Patreon.com/LionsofLiberty. And we do tons of bonus content for our patrons, because we really believe in delivering value for your buck. So we're always doing extra bonus segments with guests. I think you've done a few bonus episodes taking questions from our patrons, so we always appreciate that, and they really do too. So we always look to try to reward the people that help us and help us do amazing things, like go to PorcFest, like make these documentaries. So those are the main things, though: LionsofLiberty.com and the Patreon.

WOODS: All right, excellent. So I'll link to that at TomWoods.com/1501, and continued good luck to you, Marc, and I'm very glad to be comrades in arms in all this.

CLAIR: Thanks, Tom. It's been a blast. Thanks for having me on.