

JOE NEWMAN



Joseph J. Newman
with **Robyn Elizabeth Davis**

**We the People of the United States,
in Order to form a more perfect Union,
establish Justice,
insure domestic Tranquility,
provide for the common defense,
promote the general Welfare,
and secure the Blessings of Liberty
to ourselves and our Posterity,
do ordain and establish
this Constitution for
the United States of America.**

Foreword

As I was writing my book, “How Our Government Really Works, Despite What They Say” I could think of only one person I knew to write its foreword and make my project complete. That man was Joseph Newman!

Throughout his life, Joseph Newman has remained a steadfast defender of American ideals and principles. The consistent stance of Joseph Newman throughout his adult life is founded upon a basic tenet that all are created equal. Joseph Newman has continuously written, spoken and lived a life demanding that society recognize everyone, regardless of race, religion, economic status, health or illness, mental or physical disability. His ideology is simple - all people must have the right to enjoy their liberty to the fullest and in actual freedom. By promoting this belief, Joseph Newman has consistently pursued the objective of nurturing an ideal society in which each individual shares the beautiful bounties of our great nation.

Although I have known this man for over thirty years, it is but a small swath of time considering he will reach his 104th birthday in January 2017. What may appear “elderly” on the outside hardly masks the man who maintains an abundance of exuberance for living, learning, explaining, debating and conjuring up a future brighter than our yesterdays. Who else could fill that role except

one that has lived those “yesterdays?”

Some time ago, I asked Joseph Newman to present to my college-level American History classes. While presenting, he was asked who was the first president he recalled. His response? “Woodrow Wilson!” It still brings a smile to my face whenever I recall that moment when students’ jaws literally dropped in awe. Joseph Newman captured my students’ undivided attention, as he does with everyone he encounters. With a quick wit and smile, Joseph Newman is a walking, talking, primary source of historical knowledge. Along with those memories come the vast experience of living through the Roaring Twenties, WWII, Korea, the Cold War, The Civil Rights Movement, Viet Nam, Watergate and every event on the political scene since. His exposure to inventions and technology alone are enough to blow one’s mind! In 2014, Joseph Newman ran for Congress and at the age of 101 and it was easy for him to promise he would only serve one term!

Knowing, arguing with and learning from Joseph Newman are truly extraordinary gifts. One cannot avoid thinking harder after talking with Joseph Newman - especially when he ends the conversation with a challenge of “you can do better!” He represents a link to a past so easily forgotten today, a past that witnessed a tremendous transformation of an evolving society, eventually reaching the hectic pace of current times, which even today has never slowed him down. Throughout his many and varied life experiences - and they are countless - his concerns for the future of our nation are perpetually hopeful. He has seen the twists and turns, the good, the bad, and the ugly of our public policy decisions. Through it all, Joseph Newman remains steadfast in all of his convictions - that we are a great society and that hope still

exists that America will do the right thing towards all that inhabit this great earth.

Although words cannot properly address all who Joseph Newman is, there is hope this book will at least give you a sketch of the sheer excellence and deep patriotism exuding from every pore of this fine gentleman. It goes without saying, I am proud to know he is my children's great-grandfather and my grandchildren's great-great-grandfather. To us, he is simply, and lovingly, Grandpa Joe.

If there is one quote that befits Joseph Newman, it is one from America's original "elder statesman," Benjamin Franklin - "We are all born ignorant, but one must work hard to remain stupid." Trust me, these words accurately sum up Joseph Newman.

Daniel R. Rubin
Venice, Florida
November 2016



Introduction

The son of Russian revolutionaries, Joseph Newman was born to take action. After being exiled to Siberia by the Tsar for separate offenses, Joe's parents met in the Siberian prison town of Yakutsk. Eventually permitted to leave for the United States, the family spent a short time in Chicago, Illinois, where Joe was born, and later took root in South Bend, Indiana.

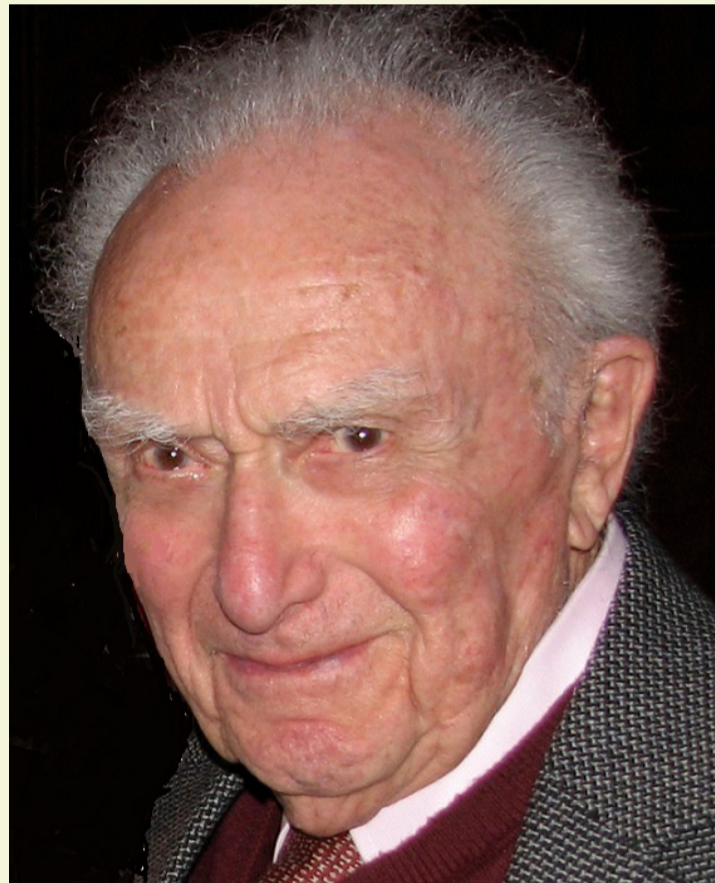
Born January 13, 1913, Joe graduated cum laude from the University of Notre Dame in 1936 with a Bachelors Degree in Accounting. Shortly after graduation, he was hired as one of the early employees of the newly founded Social Security Administration. After time spent training in Baltimore, New York and Chicago, he returned to Indiana to help administer and advocate for the program there.

He and his wife, Sophie, had one daughter, Rita Jo who was injured at birth, leading to profound developmental disabilities. With the influence of his parents and the inspiration of his daughter, Joe became one of the most influential people in special education and services for the disabled, as they exist today.

After the deaths of Rita Jo and Sophie, Joe retired to Sarasota, Florida. Through his later relationships with Belle and Anita, plus the many adopted members of his family, Joe has become a grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather.

He uses his time to run for Congress, assist in local communities, run discussion groups, speak to local organizations and schools, and remain a very vocal spokesperson for every member of our society.

Joe has been a fiery advocate for social change for nearly a century. His life of accomplishments forces people to reevaluate what they believe can be done in a single lifetime.



“W hat am I willing to accept?

What do I want out of society, to make it a true society?”

On Activism

By nature, we want to improve the world. Every family, all parents, want the world to be better for their children than it was for them. We have to apply that to society as a whole and make it better for all children.

The details of how my parents ended up in Siberia and were permitted to leave for the United States are unclear. History tells us they may have spoken out against the abject poverty of peasants, working conditions or discrimination against minorities, including themselves. The reasons they were there may be lost, but the things that they stood for and the lessons they learned lived on in my family, around the table, in everything we did. Because of my parents' activism, I don't just believe, I do.

My father was born to an Orthodox Jewish family, but later renounced most things that were religious. He embraced his heritage but shied away from orthodoxy. One of the pivotal moments in his decision to embrace secular Judaism came from hearing that the local Rabbis told jailers to keep young revolutionaries in jail because they had marched in protest on a holy day. He felt that the Rabbis should have been supporting the people in making gains, over and above concerns of being observant. He felt that religious leaders should lead!

The Christians say, "Do unto others as you would have them

do unto you.” It’s active. It’s not saying be nice, its saying do something. To me, if we could get that across to those who follow that faith and other faiths, then the idea is they would get up in the morning and they would be looking for what they can do to make the world better. That’s one of the points of religion that we can’t seem to emphasize enough. Those who actually do – we’re told there’s something wrong with us.

The Declaration of Independence includes the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” I ask the question: if they are the rights of the individual, isn’t it the responsibility of society to fulfill those rights? If someone has a right to education, do I have a responsibility to help fulfill that? If someone has a right to food or healthcare, do I have a responsibility to help fulfill that? Don’t we, as a society, have a responsibility to fulfill those rights?

The Preamble reads, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” When I’m on the soapbox, I ask people to think about that: We the People shall do these certain things. Why don’t we do what our forefathers said we are supposed to do? We are supposed to work for the good of the people, not the good of the parties. The parties need to realize that what they are selling is not being bought, that they need to fix themselves.

On Special Education

My daughter, Rita Jo, was injured at birth and was profoundly developmentally disabled. She couldn't feed herself. She slobbered when she was fed. She couldn't speak. People didn't want to sit next to her. My wife, Sophie, found herself excluded from groups because other parents were afraid it would hurt her to hear about their children. It did hurt her.

She realized that there had to be others out there like us, like Rita Jo, and she did something about it. She found three other women with mentally disabled children and hosted a lunch. By the time that lunch was over, they had created a group and I was president. I looked at Rita Jo, looked at myself and said, 'Yes, I should be doing something about this.' My mother would say that is when I really matured, that I began to realize that changes needed to be made and that they are only going to be made if I go out and try to make them. I'm deeply proud of the great success we had in changing the attitudes of society towards the mentally disabled.

Our group was the St. Joe County Association for Retarded Children. We placed ads in the local paper looking for other families like ours and we grew. We advocated for our children. We informed people. We grew. We founded the Indiana Association for Retarded Children. Our work was going on in a handful of

cities across the country. By 1950, a number of these state groups came together in Minneapolis, Minnesota and created what is now known as The ARC of the United States.

Over the years, I spoke to different groups about inclusion of a special group in our society that needed extra care. I can remember the silence during my talks, when I told people that their children would be fighting for the needs of their disabled children if we didn't do something now. Afterward, over coffee and cookies, I always heard from those who knew someone, maybe a niece or nephew with disabilities. Then I would ask them, 'If you know someone, too, why aren't you doing what I'm doing?'

One of the major accomplishments we achieved was opening The Logan School for Retarded Children in 1950. No one would believe that these children could learn so we had to prove to our state legislators that they could, before the state would ever consider funding education for the developmentally disabled. We hired a former school principal as our teacher for an annual salary of \$2,400. We had \$24 in our treasury and a lot of faith in our children and in our community. Our experiment worked.

Eventually, we got the funding to educate our children. South Bend became a model for other cities across the country. I remember the night before the legislation was to go before the legislature, getting a call from our State Senator asking if this is what we really wanted. It was. That legislation has led to things we couldn't have hoped for or dreamed of back then.

The Logan School, now known as LOGAN, has grown into a multi-million dollar organization supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Rita Jo was never able to attend the Logan School; she was too severely

disabled. She was never able to walk or talk, but because she lived, real change happened in the world.

As Rita Jo's parents, our deepest concern was what would happen to her if something happened to us. We feared that Rita Jo would end up in an institution. One of the things I am most proud of is that I was able to convince the Board of Directors that they needed a guardianship program. That guardianship program is now LOGAN's Protective Services department that advocates for anyone with an intellectual or developmental disability. Today LOGAN Protective Services is advocating for over 125 people who live on their own or in nursing facilities without family support and any others who find themselves in crisis.

**Because she lived,
real change happened
in the world.**

On Being Liberal

I find that my way of thinking is not a way out; my way of thinking requires you to act. I was born on the side that fights to make changes. Going back to my parents, and even now, those who have liberal thoughts are considered outsiders. We are called bleeding heart liberals. What is wrong with that? Why do people look at us, so-called bleeding heart liberals, and say that there is something bad about that; that we are not thinking right? We look in the mirror and consider what to do because we can't figure out their thinking, either. We believe that there is something wrong with the person who can't see that we have to work together to achieve. A society needs to unite to achieve the things that it needs and can only do together.

There's a mentality that the government uses "my" money to benefit others. I'm getting too old to drive, so what if I called for I-75 to be shut down because I don't want my tax dollars going for something that doesn't benefit me? What if I refuse to pay school taxes because I don't have children in the public school system? We have to resist that kind of thinking at all levels. If someone can find a solution to that way of thinking, I think we will be fine.

Politicians like to say that the great thing about America is that each person can be a great success but they forget to elaborate on that idea. We have lost hold of the ideal that a single

strong person being a hero or a champion doesn't achieve much unless they take the rest of society with them. Liberals argue that we want to see those strong individuals enable society, as a whole, to improve upon itself. We can see easily enough what you can do for yourself, or your family and loved ones with great wealth, but liberals have never forgotten that you do much better if you bring others along with you.

I sometimes walk into a group, and if my reputation precedes me, or they know me, they will tell each other, 'Be careful what you listen to when Joe talks, because he comes from the other side.' But aren't we all really on the same side?

Since the most recent presidential election we have heard cries for unity from the other side of the political spectrum. I ask the person who asks me to join them, what do you want me to join you in doing? In hating Mexicans? In hating Muslims? Where exactly are you taking me if we unite? I'll go with you, but we have to talk about where we are going. We have to find a direction that benefits all of society, not just some of it.

**I was born on
the side that fights
to make changes.**

On Government

I think I have a line on explaining government. People are anti-government but they forget that government is as old as creation. There's a story about a place called Eden. There was only one couple living there. The Governor of Eden didn't like that the woman ate an apple and kicked them out. That's government and its been going on forever. Why can't we understand what governing is about? Why do we say it is evil? Government is really a tool of civilization. I contend that it is a truism that government is the tool a society uses to administer its needs. Without this tool, society would be stymied.

I am deeply saddened when I hear people claim that our government can no longer be trusted; that despite our best efforts, our voices no longer matter. I believe that the system of government created by the framers of the Constitution is sound. Our uniquely American system of government is not the problem. The problem is the people we elect to represent us in our government. Although politicians have historically looked out for their own self-interests and engage in efforts to benefit those that give them financial support, the current climate since the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* has led to previously unimaginable levels of financial influence. Money now buys elections, instead of recognizable patriotic service

earning candidates their seats.

Unlike the past, Americans can no longer rely on an impartial media dedicated to serve the traditional role as watchdogs of the government. Instead, media, to far too great a degree, has now become “talking heads” determined to burnish the ideological theories of the existing political parties and their supporting special interests. We must therefore, find other ways for all citizens to be heard.

**Government is
really a tool
of civilization.**

On Running For Congress

I ran for Congress in 2014, to represent the 16th Congressional District of Florida in the U.S. House of Representatives. A lot of people have asked me, what possesses a 101-year-old person to run for Congress? I didn't run to win. I knew it was a futile effort. I was running against Vern Buchanan, a Republican incumbent in a historically Republican district.

To me the absence of a discussion about what we as a society need to do to create a better life, not just for ourselves but for future generations, was not out there and we were not hearing it from Mr. Buchanan. He would be back in office without much opposition. We had to ask ourselves, do we want him elected believing that we are fully accepting his solutions for our country, that they were the only solutions out there? Or was it necessary that we place other options and other ideas before him? I felt there were other options and I wanted them to be heard. As a society, I feel that we are losing what I would say religions are for: to make a better society. It wasn't there. It wasn't talked about. So I felt, not the urge, but a responsibility, because we couldn't find anyone else who would get on the soapbox. I know that it sounds like I am patting myself on the back, but if no one else would do it I had better do it. The message I put out there resonated. The feedback we received told me that. I may have been the only one willing to

put myself out there and say, 'We need to talk,' but I wasn't the only one who wanted to say it.

The fact that neither of the major parties would back me was, to me, frighteningly indicative of the way things are. The Democrats had a tool that the party could have used to spread their message, even if we didn't win, because my age was an entry to the conversation. We could have spread the message much further with the support of a party, much more than just a small group was able to do. There was nothing wrong with the candidate that the local Democrats chose to back and he can be proud that he too, stepped up. My criticism is strictly for the party, for not using the best voice available to them. Neither I, nor their candidate, was likely to win, and they didn't ask themselves who was the best tool for them to make their message heard.

Our current representative will be in office as long as he wants to be, so any gains we make will be in changing his mind. After I met him, I realize that speaking to him directly about our concerns and desires is the best way to influence him. I may have been the best thing we had to influence him, a public voice, criticizing him, asking him to consider a better way for society. Whether it is me or someone else, this is what we need to do. We need to create groups who are going to meet with their own Congressional representatives and get them to listen to what the people want and need.

If the current Congress doesn't resist Donald Trump, we may be doomed, but if we can get four, five, six Republicans to see things differently, we have a chance. Maybe there is a better solution that we haven't thought of yet. I am not convinced that protesting in the streets will help the resistance to what

Mr. Trump stands for. The Trump we know, right now, would resist it. If you read his response to the message given to Mike Pence at “Hamilton” recently, that Trump doesn’t want to listen, his mind is made up. Somehow, someone has to get to Mr. Trump or Mr. Pence or Congress and indicate there is another viewpoint, and ask them to consider it.

Running for Congress was a great experience. What is truly interesting is people still say they wish I would run again. When I hear that, I know that what I am trying to say is important to them. We arranged interviews and in almost every case I could sense that the interview began with them expecting a side show feature, almost a freak. Did they think we didn’t know we would be laughed at, at first? But as each interview progressed you could feel the change in their attitude. They expected a freak show and they got an informed candidate. One national outlet even invited me back, not as an interviewee, but as a panelist.

My run for Congress came about because great necessities call out for solutions. My involvement was not intended to be limited to just me personally, but instead to inspire citizens of all ages and walks of life to get involved, get engaged, and become active leaders. If I expect others to step up and run for office, then I, too, should be willing.

**Great necessities
call out
for solutions.**

On Anthropological Progressivism

I coined the term Anthropological Progressive. People ask me what it means to be an Anthropological Progressive. Anthropology, as I see it, is the study of the development of a society, in our case, the human society. From the beginning of time, humans have discussed and argued about the improvement of society's character and our relationships to one another. The many religious documents that exist, I believe, are a continuation of our desire to improve society. I contend that the Declaration of Independence and, in particular, the Preamble to our Constitution, are statements of humanity's need to continuously move toward improving society. My personal belief in progress towards a better society makes me, what I call an Anthropological Progressive.



On Protesting

Protesting has been around forever and it has made a difference. Don't most of us take pride in the kids of the 60s? Aren't we proud of the changes they forced? Think back in history, the troublemakers are the ones who caused change. If it wasn't for the trouble making Abolitionists, we might still have slavery in America. When we see something that we feel needs to be changed, if we don't take action, the next generation has to do it, or the generation after that. Jesus was a liberal protester, eliminated because of his positions. It solidifies thinking like mine that those movements to make change are not something new, it has gone through all of civilizations. The Russian revolution brought about an end to the tsarist autocracy; Abolitionists brought an end to slavery in the US; the list goes on.

I've been a member of the local The Nation discussion group for a number of years. At the beginning, we were maybe six people, sitting and talking about articles. A few of us decided that talking was interesting, but we needed to be active in the community. The group leader headed out of town for the summer and told us to see what we could do. Now, instead of six, we get twenty-five people and we are doing more than just talking. We've started a satellite group in the Newtown area of Sarasota to address their community's specific needs. We write letters. We get out in the

community. We have protested with Occupy. We're working on starting an evening group for working age people. We want to change the world.

Protesting and activism can be on a personal level, too. I've been thinking that for Hanukkah, I'll give subscriptions to The Nation. Maybe they will read it, maybe they won't, but even if they throw it out, they will have to recognize that there is another way of thinking out there.

**Troublemakers are
the ones who
caused change.**

On Progress

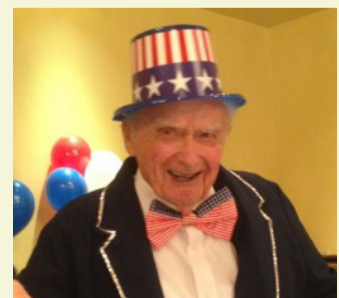
If people are not informed, they do not understand the need for the change and how it benefits them. There are those who would say that people are afraid of change and so they reject it. This can impede progress.

There are those who take advantage of the progress for themselves and then resist it for others. Some will try to slow the process but we have always made progress, even when it felt like we were going backwards.

Slavery is as old as civilization itself, but we are seeing developed countries getting rid of it, even though it still goes on. That is progress, but there is still work to be done.

The New Deal put in place the hopes people had for years before that, relief from poverty, recovery of the economy and reform of the financial system. We still need the “3 Rs” of the New Deal, but we are in better shape than we were during the Great Depression because of the programs enacted under the New Deal.

In just the past few years, look at the expansion of Women’s rights and LGBTQ rights. That’s progress.



Author's Note

When I tell the story of how I met Joe Newman, I tell everyone that the first thing he ever said to me was, “If I make it six weeks, I’ll be ninety-nine,” but that isn’t completely true. The first thing Joe ever said to me was, “I’m Joe Newman and I’ve been wanting to meet you;” then he told me he was fast approaching ninety-nine years old.

I had no idea that night what an unparalleled compliment it was to have Joe Newman want to meet you. I’ve been fortunate enough since then to learn what a privilege it is to be a part of Joe’s world. It’s an inspiration simply to be around him; a never-ending challenge to accomplish even a fraction of what he does, or attempt to live up to the example he sets and the expectations he has for you. That first night we met, I did learn one thing very quickly: never, ever, so long as you live, follow Joe as a speaker. Only his well-informed, well-crafted points exceed his eloquence.

Few people plan to live to be 100 and beyond, but if you do have that longevity and you are Joe Newman, you simply continue to move forward. While others are content to nurture their past projects, or simply relax, Joe is always asking himself what else he can do to make things better in the world. From his lifelong work on behalf of the developmentally disabled to his current work in Newtown, Joe is simply, never done. I firmly believe that his work

will continue on long after we are both gone.

During our interviews for this project, Joe said that his goals included having someone say, “I’m glad I knew him, and that changes happened because of him.” I can say without hesitation that I am deeply glad I know Joe and am witness to the changes that have happened and will continue to happen because of him.

Danny was right, in his foreword, when he said, “words cannot properly address all who Joseph Newman is.” This booklet is just a brief distillation of a select few interviews, conversations and speeches, and can only offer you a glimpse of everything that is Joe Newman.

We should all be so incredibly lucky to know Joe.

Robyn Elizabeth Davis
Bradenton, Florida
December 2016



“At what age does a person become too old to think and reason?”



At what age does a person no longer have a concern for society?

At what age does a person no longer have a responsibility to act when acting may help?”