

As the world ricochets between justified anger and fear over terrorism, many people feel that individuals exert no influence over events.

But the most powerful force in society is the single human being who stands up for what he or she believes in. People just have to look in the right place to see their own power.

I don't know what to expect from the world in the coming months. I am still in shock from waking up to make breakfast for my husband and seeing, instead, the World Trade Center collapse. The geopolitics left by the World Trade Center rubble is so unpredictable and frightening that I feel overwhelmed by the Big Picture.

For me, the worst part of post-Sept. 11 life was feeling helpless and insignificant as an individual. The issues were too huge and

issue that impacts their lives that they take action.

At first, people speak out as individuals, with freedom happening one person at a time. A parent who can no longer tolerate the values being taught to her child in the public schools decides to homeschool. A divorced father who pays 80 percent of his take-home pay in child support while being denied visitation writes a letter to an editor. A woman who is shaken by Sept. 11 buys her first gun and assumes responsibility for self-defense.

When other voices join in, a movement is born.

It is natural to feel helpless in the face of Sept. 11, but the basics of society have not changed: The basic unit is the single human being who stands up for personal liberty and takes responsibility—not by ignoring world events;

# MAKING SOME SENSE OF IT ALL

by Wendy McElroy

removed from my experience. The Middle East is a quagmire. Terms like “weapons of mass destruction” or “regime change” describe situations foreign to average people. The politics of Afghanistan involve human beings I'll never meet in places I'll never visit. And Iraq is a color on the map. The Big Picture can seem unreal and utterly beyond my control.

I lost that sense of helplessness by taking action in an area where the true power of an individual voice is still felt: The grassroots causes that express everyday political concerns. Homeschooling, father's rights, gun rights—these “smaller” causes, and dozens of others, are as pressing as they were before Sept. 11. Through them individuals can dramatically change, not the Middle East or Afghanistan, but their own communities.

Grassroots movements have spread like wildfire across North America in the last decade. The movements begin with average people who become so dissatisfied with an

not by ceasing to speak out on the Big Picture; but by realizing that “small” problems in our own backyards are as important as they always were. And they respond to the power of the individual. They depend upon the social concern and common decency of ordinary people.

An individual's voice speaks loudly.

On Dec. 1, 1955, a black woman was tired after working hard all day. It wasn't political activism that made Rosa Parks refuse to move from her seat to the back of the bus: She was just weary and fed up. Yet that one action has been credited with sparking the civil rights movement that swept America in the '60s.

In 1997, Jodie Williams won the Nobel Peace Prize. She had worked for years—sometimes alone from her home in Vermont—to expose the problem of landmines that remain after warfare and cause hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties.

Terry Fox was 18 years old when bone cancer forced him to have his right leg amputated six inches above the knee. Fitted with a prosthetic leg, he began a solo marathon to raise awareness of cancer, especially in children. With no fanfare, on April 12, 1980, he started from St. John's to run 26 miles a day across the width of Canada. He was forced to stop midway due to a recurrence of cancer that killed him.

Inspired by his bravery, Terry Fox marathons are held across Canada and around the world every year. More than \$300 million has been raised for cancer research.

Individuals are powerful, not helpless in the face of events.

We live in the world at large and global questions cannot be ignored. But most of all we live in our own backyards. Grassroots advocate Gina Jankovich offers some advice on how to start tackling the smaller problems:

Focus on your passion. Gravitate to the issues that speak to your heart: your children's education, the privacy of your medical records, over-taxation ...

Speak up. And not just in a political manner such as letters to an editor or statements read in front of your city council. Talk to neighbors, co-workers, family, friends.

Become a role model. If you advocate homeschooling, then practice homeschooling; to the best of your ability. Be part of the solution to the problem you have identified.

Whatever happens on the global scene, everyday concerns are as important now as they were before Sept. 11. Take back your power by fighting for freedom and common decency on a grassroots level. Just as God is in the details, freedom is in the individual. Liberty's ultimate source and extreme power is the single human being who stands up to be counted.

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