

[Fay Ballard](#) さんがコメントしました。

[Fay Ballard](#) Great to read a story of a transition in political allegiance as a result of life experiences. These stories are too rare, and I feel sad that the reaction of many on the 'new' side is hostility. The path to realising and accepting one's involvement in, benefit from, and responsibility to change a system which oppresses others can be long, I think we should try to support people who are along the path, even if they're just at the start.

[Social Issues](#)

She's 54, white, rural and a lifelong Republican.

Why is she protesting Donald Trump?



Joanne Barr, 54, poses for a portrait at her home in Cogan Station, Pa. Barr, a former Republican turned Democrat, will travel from Williamsport, Pa., to Washington to attend the Women's March. (Heather Ainsworth/For The Washington Post)

By [Terrence McCoy](#) January 21

Seventy-one miles into a 162-mile trip, the women riding the bus began to stir as the blackness of the morning lifted. They had gathered at 3:30 a.m. in a parking lot in Williamsport, Pa., and now, as signs for Washington started appearing, one woman applied makeup with a mirror, another bounced a baby on her lap, and two more talked about what could happen when they got where they were going.

As the bus entered the city on Baltimore Washington Parkway, Joanne Barr looked out the window. "So many buses," she said quietly to herself. "It's a lot of people."

Forty-two people were riding with her, adding to the tens of thousands of people pouring into the city on 1,800 buses to join the Women’s March on Washington and protest the inauguration of President Trump. They have come, for the most part, from Hillary Clinton’s America: large metropolitan communities like Chicago and Atlanta, or smaller college towns like Ann Arbor, Mich., and Madison, Wis. But there were some women, though far fewer in number, who departed the America that fueled the rise of Trump, and this is the America of Williamsport.

A mountainous town of 30,000 residents in central Pennsylvania, its economy and culture have long been tethered to the vagaries of hard industry — first lumber, then manufacturing, then natural gas — and it anchors a county that is 92 percent white and went 71 percent for Trump.



Joanne Barr, 54, marches down Constitution Avenue toward the Mall to protest the inauguration of Donald Trump on Saturday. (Terrance McCoy/The Washington Post)

This is the only town, the only America, that Barr, 54, riding the bus with her daughter, Ashley, 30, has ever known. A petite woman who feels most comfortable when no one is looking at her, she has never done anything like this before. She has only been to Washington one time, and big cities intimidate her. Back home in Williamsport, she manages a hardware store, which exclusively employs white men and almost exclusively services them. Most days, she adores the job. But more and more, especially after the campaign and election, she has begun to feel claustrophobic, not only there but in Williamsport.

Is she happy? Is she living the life she was supposed to? Is it too late at this point in her life — a middle-aged, divorced mother of three — to be someone different?

Why has she come?

She sat quietly toward the front of the bus, unsure, but hopeful, that this march, this trip to Washington, might provide an answer.

A woman transformed

Two days before that moment, Barr was in a house with a bare refrigerator.

“No food in this house,” she said of her home, miles outside Williamsport, up serpentine roads leading into the hills, where she moved a decade ago to escape the bustle and people of town. She went to the fridge and checked a grocery list hanging beside a schedule of local Alcoholics Anonymous meetings that her son had recently begun attending.

Grocery list in hand, she headed for the car, past a bookcase with 20 books she has read on addiction and recovery: “Addict in the Family,” “Why Don’t They Just Quit,” “Heroin is Killing our Children.”

Massive crowds gather for the Women’s March on Washington

Play Video2:27

Hundreds of thousands of activists descended on downtown Washington for a rally and march, the day after President Donald Trump took office. The sheer number of attendees caused confusion and complicated logistics. (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Oliver Contreras/The Washington Post)

There was a time when Barr thought addiction was something that happened to other families, to people not as successful, religious and conservative. But that was before her husband went from painkillers to cocaine to crack, before her son nearly died of a heroin overdose, before she realized how quickly success can yield to debt, religion to doubt, conservatism to whatever she had now become.

Getting behind the wheel, she flipped the ignition, and the radio came on. It was CNN Radio, and a voice was saying, “This is truly the beginning, as of right now, you’re witnessing it right now, the beginning of President-elect Trump’s time in Washington, D.C.” At one time, she would have quickly turned the dial, worried she wasn’t smart enough to learn about politics. But now, “I listen to it constantly. I used to listen to music and stupid things. Now I listen to this.”

She often thinks about all the things she once did — and did not do — wondering how she could have been so insecure for so long. In Williamsport, she grew up wanting only to marry a man who would take care of everything, and that’s exactly what she got. Bill was everything she was not: confident, effervescent, assertive. He owned two hardware stores and properties across the city, and they raised three children in a big, showy house in a nice part of town. He said he always knew best, and she always believed him, even when he told her not to worry about all of his empty prescription pill bottles and frequent nose bleeds and increasingly erratic behavior. For years she found a way to excuse everything he did, until one night in September 2006, when “he punched her in her face with a closed fist,” according to the criminal complaint, and told her “he would ‘kill her’ if she called the police.”

She pulled the car out to the end of the driveway, stopped at the mailbox and reached inside to grab a package.

“I got it! Been waiting for this,” she said, unfurling a sweatshirt emblazoned with the symbol of the Women’s March on Washington. “It will keep me warm.”

She steered onto a road heading toward Williamsport, passing homes with tractors and cows and Confederate flags, counting the Trump yard signs as she went. “This guy still has his Trump sign up,” she said. “There are more Trump signs down here. Everywhere you go, there are Trump signs.”

If this had been a few years ago, Barr knew she would have owned one of those signs. Everyone in her family had always voted Republican, as had Bill, before he died of a heart attack in 2009 at age 52. Barr did, too. But the campaign stirred so many questions, not only about her community but also about herself. How, when her son had struggled with mental illness, could people support someone who mocked a disabled man? How, when she had often felt small in her life, could people cheer someone who demeaned women? Was it Williamsport that had changed? Or was it her?

So a few months ago, she took an I’m With Her mug into the hardware store and put up a sign saying “No Sexism” after hearing customers say degrading things about Hillary Clinton. She argued with her boyfriend, who called Barr a “radical feminist.” She switched her

registration from Republican to Democrat and got a tattoo, her first, saying, “Rewrite an ending or two for the girl that I knew.”

The night of the election, she stayed up late, texting with Ashley, who had also turned against Republican ideals.

“Looks like we’ll be having to say President Trump,” Barr said.

“I’m not going to trust anyone anymore,” Ashley said.

“Too many mean, vile people,” Barr said. “One thing this election did for me is to empower me. The people at work will see a different person tomorrow.”

“You yell or cry at work yet?” Ashley asked the following day.

“I don’t know how I’m going to get thru the day,” Barr replied. “I want a new relationship, new house, new job, everything.”

She soon noticed postings about a Women’s March on Facebook, and then about a bus that would take her from a city where almost no one agreed with her to a city where almost everyone did. And now, weeks later, she was at the grocery store, collecting enough food to also feed her daughter, who would soon be arriving to ride the bus with her. She paid for the groceries, went back to her car and turned on the radio.

“Would you agree your new boss is famous for firing people?” a senator was asking during a confirmation hearing broadcast on CNN.

“Well, he has a show about it. Other than the show . . . ” came the response.

“It’s a blurred line at this point. We’re not sure where the show stops and where the reality begins.”

Reality: Barr silently listening, gripping the steering tightly and shaking her head as she pulled the car back into the garage. “Sometimes,” she said, “this gets to me, and I have to turn it off.”

So she reached for the dial, removed the groceries, grabbed her march sweatshirt and, carrying all of it, walked inside.

A journey begins

At 2:55 a.m. the morning of the march, Barr was wearing that sweatshirt and putting a few last things in her bag. She had been up past midnight, watching the news about the protests in Washington, some of which had turned violent and led to scores of arrests, and was scared about what could happen that day. Would the police think they were violent, too? Ashley, always so brave and assured, had told her the night before not be nervous, and now it was time to try to follow that advice.

She picked up her bag and keys.

“Ready? Is everyone ready?” she said, stopping to breath for a moment. “I can’t believe we did it, but we did it. We’re there.”

She got into the car, driving out into a thick fog that made it impossible to see further than a few feet ahead. She soon arrived at the Lycoming Mall, where stores have been increasingly going out of business, and parked near dozens of cars, their headlights punching holes into the mist. Soon, the first bus drove up, then the second, and the third.

“More people than you would think,” she told Ashley.

“Definitely surprised,” Ashley said. “I knew there were more people who were fed up around here, but never knew there was going to be enough to fill three buses.”

Barr watched the women among a smattering of men. There were older women, younger women, children. People who had rarely, if ever, been to Washington or gone to a protest. People shaking hands and introducing themselves to one another. Some had heard that the crowds could be much bigger than what showed up for the inauguration; others talked about the marches that had happened the night before around the world.

To Barr, who mostly listened, they didn’t look any different from the people she had always known, but somehow this felt different, as if something new and fragile was just beginning.

She took a seat near the front of the bus and watched Ashley, who was in charge of their bus, begin counting heads and making announcements. And then a woman with curly red hair and glasses appeared at the top of the stairs.

“I have some information about the League of Women Voters. We are starting a chapter in Lycoming County. I brought a few paper applications,” she said. “Does anyone want information about League of Women Voters?”

Barr, who had never signed up for anything like that before and had never heard of the League of Women Voters, watched as the woman stopped in front of her.

In that moment, Barr had yet to carry a protest sign miles from the bus to the Mall. She had yet to stand before the Trump International Hotel and, quietly at first, then louder, chant words of protest. She had yet to witness crowds bigger than any in her life, crowds that didn’t scare her nearly as much as she thought they would. And she had yet to realize that what she was most afraid of was returning to Williamsport and falling into a rut that this time she would not be able to pull herself out of.

At that moment on the bus, there was just the woman standing in front of her, holding information packets about the women’s voting group, asking, “Do you want one?”

There was a long pause.

“Sure,” Barr said. “I’ll take one.”

The bus driver then punched “Washington” into his GPS, pulled out into the mist, and started for the nation’s capital.



Terrence McCoy covers poverty, inequality and social justice. He also writes about solutions to