



JANINE TURNER

OF
CONSTITUTING
AMERICA



BY MARK BEDOR



She's best known as Alaskan bush pilot Maggie O'Connell in the hit 1990s TV series *Northern Exposure*. She's also starred in NBC's *Friday Night Lights*, Lifetime TV's *Strong Medicine* and numerous major motion pictures, including *Cliffhanger* with Sylvester Stallone. But, today, you're more likely to see actress Janine Turner on *Larry King Live*, *The O'Reilly Factor* or *Fox News*

Sunday talking about "Constituting America."

Co-founded with political activist Cathy Gillespie (the wife of former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie), Constituting America is a web based organization dedicated to educating Americans, and especially young Americans, about the foundational document of our nation's government – the Constitution

of the United States. Turner's 12-year-old daughter Juliette is also very involved in the program, serving as National Youth Director. Janine and Juliette talked to *The Cowboy Way* about their efforts.

TCW: *Why do you think there's a need to educate people about the Constitution and related documents like the Federalist Papers?*

Janine Turner: We, as citizens, don't know what we have and if our children don't know what their rights are and what we have, we're not going to know when they're taken away from us. I just think that knowledge is power. John Adams, my favorite [American] Forefather, stated that, "Liberty can not be preserved without a general knowledge among the people." And I say that liberty can not be preserved without general knowledge of the Constitution. So, I believe the future of our country depends upon awareness and an understanding and knowledge of the Constitution.

I started to get very concerned about the National Debt... really, really worried about it... and started to feel that we might lose our Republic, our liberties. Because, I think, whenever countries get in dire straits, that's when tyranny can raise its ugly head. History has proven this. So, I started to find my voice. As I found my voice, I wanted to be more educated. I felt like I needed to know more. I read the Constitution and thought, "I really want to understand what they meant and where they were coming from." Then, I was watching this seminar on the internet from Hillsdale College. That's when I heard the quote from the 62ND Federalist Paper. It was during the health care debate and it's an amazing quote! "It will be of little avail to the people that the laws are made by men of their own choice if the laws be so voluminous so that they can not be read, or so incoherent that they can not be understood." I mean, could that be more relevant?

The Constitution is being dismissed as irrelevant and antiquated... a "living document" that should be changed. And, you know what? It's not! It's incredibly relevant. It's incredibly profound. But, it's not in our culture anymore to study it, to know it. It's kind of been tossed aside in an irreverent way. So this has been the whole thrust of why I feel it's so important.

TCW: *This interest began when you were in grade school?*

JT: I've loved the Founding Fathers since I was a little girl. I played Martha Jefferson in my first play ever, *1776*, the musical, in school. And I've just continued it. You know, it's funny, I've done a thousand interviews and this has come to my mind for the first time with you. I think it was because

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I was taught about my Founding Fathers, and then we did this play in 5TH grade. Because of the love that my teacher had for our Founding Fathers, it marked the path for my whole life. It made me a patriotic citizen, and a citizen who could appreciate what our Founding Fathers were and gave me sort of a quest and desire to learn about them. And that is *our* mission, to have teachers have that same sort of passion and desire to teach their children, and for children to then be aware and have the knowledge. Right now, our children just aren't being taught. And, on the flip side of that, I think it's a great, great responsibility of parents to make sure they communicate this with their children.

TCW: *Schools aren't doing the job?*

JT: I think there are a lot of really great teachers out there that want to. But, I think there's a big, big wave of what I consider to be an overzealousness of political correctness that is muting us as citizens. It's certainly muting our children. I believe that we need to rethink this. And, I think there are a lot of teachers out there that, of course, do value [the Constitution], but they don't feel they have, really, the right to speak out. The irony of that is that's a First Amendment right! That's one of the things I care deeply about, that we, as citizens, we should be respectful of our fellow human beings. But, we don't need to be muted to the point of political correctness where we're afraid to speak. Our First Amendment right gives us the right *to* speak.

TCW: *Your website emphasizes teaching children. Is that because of your own experiences as a child?*

JT: It was because teachers took the time to teach me about our Founding Fathers, and they did it with such reverence and passion – and this is back in the early 70s – that it had such a profound impact on me. So, yes, but I also just feel that our children don't know. I sat next to a young man at my nephew's birthday party and we talked about the Constitution. He was like, "What? Huh?" Just tossin' it off. I think that this just doesn't bode well for our future republic, our country or our children. This comes from, sort of, the culture, where nothing's really more important than where you're gonna buy your next *iPhone*. Our children will be the future leaders of our country and I think we need to really focus on that again with our children. We're going to lose our liberties if we don't.

TCW: *You're using the culture to get kids interested in the Constitution with your "We The People" contest. Tell us about that.*

JT: We've really gone beyond the norm. With other



foundations, it's just been an essay contest. We really feel that we have to reach the children in their medium, which is the culture. So, it's gonna be *YouTube* with singing, short films and all the things that intrigue children today. We encourage kids to be real creative with this. In high school, it's best short film, like the Sundance Film Festival, best song, like American Idol – let's use it for the good, right?! –



best Public Service Announcement (PSA) and best essay. We have gotten some of the most fantastic entries!

I'm getting ready to go film the winners and do a behind the scenes documentary. Then we're going to have this documentary available to schools across the country to download and play at an assembly! There will be the kids with their jeans, looking like Gap ads, being real hip and cool, talking about the Constitution and how they won \$2,000 and a trip to Philadelphia and all these cool things! The kids watching this will go, "Oh, they're cool! Oh.... the Constitution...." And the songs are fantastic! We want to slowly make a dent in the culture so this will be annually. We also want to do apps for the phones, buses that travel the country and quiz shows and talk shows and reality shows and all those kinds of things.

TCW: *How many entries have you had from around the country?*

JT: Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. We're really excited about it because we didn't launch until February. Most people would have said, "You can't launch a contest with only three months left of school!" But no, no, no – we're gonna do it, we're gonna do it. So, it was complete grassroots. We didn't really get into any of the school systems, so to speak, but we did have teachers rally around

us. So, we're very, very, very pleased! We got some great entries, with our first, not even year!

TCW: *Then you're doing a documentary?*

JT: I'm going to do a behind the scenes documentary with the kids, and within the documentary, they will be performing their songs and we'll show their short films and we'll show their PSAs. I'll interview the kids and they'll talk about how they did it, and how they feel about their country. Afterwards, that will be available on our website and it will also be available for schools. We're doing this big celebration with the kids with the winning entries on September 17TH (Constitution Day), a big program for the kids in front of Independence Hall. We're going to film the documentary through this whole process. Their works are going to be exhibited at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. So, we're going to have a program for them there.

TCW: *Who is funding all of this?*

JT: Well, that's the trick. We're a 501(c)3 non profit, so we are raising funds. We're pulling it together little bit by little bit. We just got approved by the I.R.S. so we're very excited about that.

TCW: *Sounds like you're making an impact already.*

JT: Trying! Every day! Kathy and I, my co-chair, we are diligent. I do radio and press every day and we write essays every day (for the website). It's just kind of a 24-7 project for us. But, you know, it's wonderful at this point in my life. It's not as lucrative financially for me as show-biz, but it sure is more rewarding. I kind of feel that all the paths in my life have led to this moment and this purpose. It's very, very gratifying for me.

One of the things I'm encouraging parents to do is to go to the schools and ask if their children are allowed to say the Pledge of Allegiance. You know, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. This is something that a certain genre of our country really understands... to be vocal. And, if the children are not allowed to say the Pledge of Allegiance, I would encourage the parents to say, very respectfully, "Well, why not?! Let's do it!"

TCW: *Are you paying a price in Hollywood for your activism?*

JT: This is one of my next missions. I did a radio interview the other day and [the interviewer] goes, "You and Jon Voight are the only two that seem to speak out..." I really think it's wrong! It's just wrong that in America we can not speak up, ironically, in the industry which claims to have the biggest stake on freedom of speech! That the artists who are involved in this community, who happen to be conservative, feel muted and that they will be discriminated against if they speak out. It's absolutely un-American! It's just wrong! I

don't like it at all. And, I am paying a price and I do feel it's hindered my work and being asked back for certain shows. It's just wrong, it's totally wrong!

I think the thing that I'm encouraging parents to do with their children in regard to being a squeaky wheel and stepping forward and really utilizing the First Amendment in the way that the liberals have done, I think that we in Hollywood as conservatives need to do the same thing. But, unfortunately, we all need to put bread on the table for our children, and it's a tough thing to do. But until we start speaking out together in unison, it's not going to change – and I'm doin' it. I'm just deciding that it just is wrong and at a certain point in my life righteousness sort of trumps success in show business I guess.

TCW: *Some very smart people that know the Constitution very well are actively trying to subvert it, or sit in court and say it doesn't mean what it says, for example, the recent 5-4 ruling on the 2ND Amendment. How do you fight that?*

JT: I don't understand it. We're so far away from tyranny and our Forefathers were so close to it. I think that we've lost sight, and we've lost sight because we've lost knowledge. One of the main reasons that we have a Second Amendment, that we have the right to own a handgun, is because think of what would happen if all of our handguns could be stripped of us. Dictators could walk right in and we'd have no way to defend ourselves. I mean this is a basic, basic right as an American citizen.

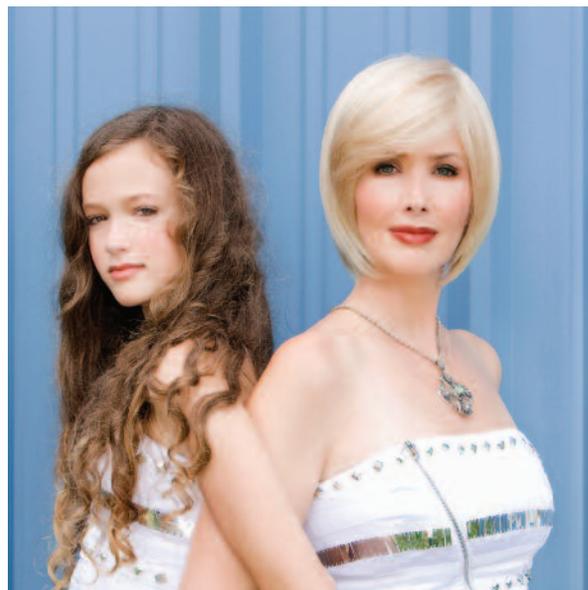
I think that that 5-4 decision is very narrow, alarmingly narrow. But look, the only way we can counter this and bring back at least an equal playing field to base judgments upon is with knowledge. This is the reason I feel so impassioned about reading the Constitution and the Federalist Papers. Knowledge will be our power and give us the tools with which to sound our voice. Of course, our vote is our voice. I wrote one essay for the website where I said Americans have been sort of asleep on the beach. The tsunami wave came in and took over. I think Americans are waking up now and the true grit, the true, wonderful sense of free enterprise and dreams and hopes that Americans have, I think that we're awakening and I still have a lot of hope. Reading the Federalist Papers, there's so many points that they make, but one is they believed "in the genius of the people," and they believed in, as Alexander Hamilton said, "The majesty of the people."

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TCW: *So, are you optimistic about the future of the country?*

JT: Well, you know, it ebbs and flows a little bit. There are days I get very scared and frightened and depressed. I think the polls show the opinion of Congress right now is at an all time low. I'm right there with America. But, I'm encouraged. I'm encouraged by our inherent genetic passion for liberty that is within all of our souls. When it gets stirred and gets awakened, I believe that Americans will rise and will become involved again and will want their voice to be heard. You can't underestimate the genius of the people.

I do have faith in the American people, but it's going to take sacrifices, sacrifices in the way our Forefathers sacrificed. I love when I read history. It was really not the first gunshot that scared Britain; it was the ten years preceding it that really frightened them, this kind of build up to the Revolutionary War. Because Americans became willing to sacrifice for the bigger cause, they wouldn't buy the tea, they wouldn't buy the fine clothes and they lived more frugally. They did it for the bigger cause and I think that that's the power. If Americans can now realize that we're going to have to make sacrifices in our own lives for the sake of our country, like our Forefathers did, then I think we'll be ok. You know, we're a stock of immigrants that came over here; we're a stock of survivors. I think there's a good heartland of America, and that's my hope.





***The Cowboy Way* also talked with Janine’s 12-year-old daughter Juliette, National Youth Director of Constituting America**

TCW: *Why did you want to do this with your mom?*

Juliette: When my mom started teaching me about the Constitution, I was like, “Wow! This really is the foundation of our country!” And our country would just fall if we didn’t have it. So many people don’t know about it today and that’s just really sad, and scary. We need to start teaching people about it so that our foundation doesn’t crumble.

TCW: *How are you teaching other kids about the Constitution?*

Juliette: Videos, and little PSAs that I put on YouTube sometimes. I did a rap song about the Constitution with my stuffed animals! I put all my stuffed animals on a window sill and I made them sing! (laughs) It was pretty crazy! YouTube wants to advertise one of my videos because it got so many views! And, Mom and I travel and tell people about the Constitution.

TCW: *Do you talk to kids that have never heard of the Constitution?*

Juliette: Yes! [One said,] “What’s the Constitution?” And I’m like, “Seriously?” So I just told him all about it. He’s like, “Okay... how does that apply today?” I had to give him the whole speech about how it’s relevant. But then, finally, he sort of caught on. So, yeah! I recruited another Constitutionalist!

TCW: *Sounds like you’re having some success!*

Juliette: Well, I love seeing the people who actually light up when we talk about it. And, when Mom and I give speeches and travel around, so many people are like, “Oh yeah! We really need to learn about that!” And I love it, because I think, “Wow! There’s hope!”

TCW: *Why is it important for you to do this?*

Juliette: Since the Constitution is the foundation of our country, and so many people don’t know about it... All of our rights can be taken away without us knowing it. My mom’s generation knows about it, but they’re choosing to ignore it. So, my generation hasn’t been taught about it and, if they haven’t been taught about it, there will be no recollection of it and it’ll just be lost. So we *have* to teach them about it.

Visit Janine and Juliette at www.constitutingamerica.com.

