

# Trailblazer, Feminist, Mom: An Appreciation



[Sara Catania](#)

My mother, former Illinois State Legislator Susan Catania, a relentless advocate for the ERA and a fearless champion of important but politically unpopular causes, died last week.

The cause was a fire that broke out during the early morning hours of November 27 in our family cabin on Cranberry Lake outside the town of Eagle River in Northern Wisconsin, where she'd moved to spend her retirement.

My mom's decade-long tenure in the legislature paralleled my elementary school years. I was five at her first inauguration and my strongest memory of that event is the itchy French woolen dresses with matching knee socks and tiny berets she'd splurged on from Marshall Field's for my sister Rachel and me.

As a child whose earliest memories include collating campaign materials on the dining room table, my mom's legislative career seemed completely normal to me. It was anything but.

In January of 1973, the U.S. was about to end its role in the Vietnam War and the Supreme Court to uphold abortion rights in *Roe v. Wade*.

The prior November, to the surprise of no one, President Nixon was re-elected in a landslide.

In Chicago's 22nd legislative district, to the surprise of nearly everyone, my mom won close to 70 percent of the Republican vote, earning her a seat in the state legislature.

In the annals of history, my mother's victory was nowhere near as momentous an event as *Roe*, Vietnam and Nixon, but in the halls of local and state political power, it was shocking.

She was white in a nearly all-Black district on Chicago's South Side, a Republican in a city of big D Democrats, and a young mother at a time when very few women — and even fewer who had children — ran for public office..

On top of all that, she had no experience in politics and no connections to the all-powerful political machine of Mayor Richard J. Daley, who maintained his white-ethnic grip on Chicago politics even as three other major U.S. cities — Los Angeles, Atlanta and Detroit — made history by electing their first African American mayors.

The birth of my sister Amy, a year after my mom's election, made the story even more unusual.

The first time I saw my new baby sister was on the front page of the Chicago Daily News, her small patch of dark hair done up by the nurses in a bow.

After that, my mom, who believed in the importance of breastfeeding, routinely took Amy with her to work, tucking her into a car bed for the three and half hour drive to Springfield and then setting the snoozing infant and her tiny bed under the vacant desk next to her on the House floor.

When Amy woke up my mom would carry her to the ladies room to feed her, listening to the proceedings on the House floor piped in through a ceiling speaker.

The whole process went so smoothly that my mom repeated it twice more.

During her decade in the legislature she had three babies, bringing the total number of my parents' children — all girls— to seven.

The combination of extreme motherhood and public service made my mom a curiosity as well as an emblem of what was then a new kind of feminist — the have-it-all Super Mom.

It was for that reason that the nascent People Magazine profiled her in 1978.

"Susan's babies are always down on the floor," then-Illinois House Speaker William Redmond, a Democrat, told the magazine. "I don't even know they are there."

Conservative Republican Rep. Gil Deavers disagreed: "They're a distraction. They destroy the decorum of an organized body."

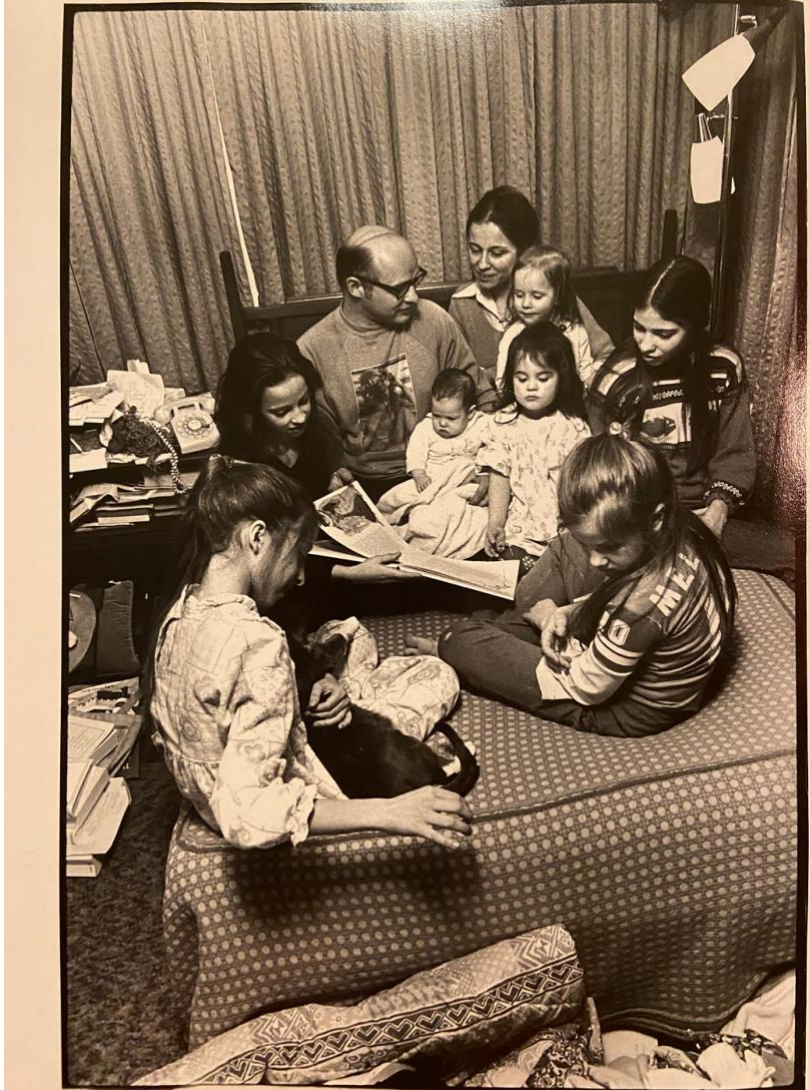
But even Deavers admired my mom's talents as a legislator.

"When she represents her district, she's a tiger," he told People. "She's as vicious as any of us down here."

As a legislator she was always a feminist.

As Redmond told People, "She is so dedicated to women's rights that she even wears a Susan B. Anthony hairdo.' "

When that article was published, I was nearly 10 years old and in fourth grade. It had been almost a year since my mom had won her third term, and five months since the birth of Maggie, the last of the Catania girls.



*This photo and the other two images accompanying this piece, were taken in early 1978, during my mom's tenure in the Illinois State Legislature for a story on my mom shortly after the birth of my youngest sister Maggie. The photographer suggested we all squeeze onto my parents' bed. I'm the one holding the book. Annemarie is sitting on my mom's lap and Amy is in front of her. Sue is to the right of Amy, and Melissa is looking down at the floor. Rachel is holding Clarence the cat. My dad, who is holding Maggie, is wearing a sweatshirt bearing the iconic swimsuit image of Farrah Fawcett, a gift to him from my mom and a testament to her dry sense of humor. PHOTO CREDIT: Dale Wittner*

My mother had long since demonstrated that her legislative service was not simply a novelty, but the press was still scratching its collective head.

The tone of the People piece was typical of a media more interested in my mother's reproductive yield than in her legislative accomplishments.

For her, the two were closely aligned, both a part of who she was personally and how she defined herself publicly.

She was having the babies she wanted to have, while doing the job she wanted to do.

If motherhood could help support her political agenda and vice versa, all the better.

My sisters and I did our part to support my mom.

We became experts in diaper-changing, lullabies and the relative merits of frosted Gerber biscuits and animal crackers.

At age 6 I'd learned to cook an egg, and then, soon after, to make stew based on a very-much-simplified recipe from Julia Child.

On the day I learned to make stew, I happened to be the one who'd picked up the phone when she called. She was stuck in a meeting and needed someone — anyone — to get the dinner started. Standing on a chair pulled up to the stove, I

followed her instructions, dropping chunks of beef into the hot pan, then adding onions and carrots.

I stirred it all, inhaling the meaty steam and the power of standing at the stove, cooking like a grown-up.

To my mom's mind, seven children was reasonable, temperate even.

She was a practicing Catholic, and the Church had long barred contraception.

For my parents that mandate aligned with their mutual desire for a large brood.

I recall my mom telling us more than once that she had planned to have sixteen children.

The fact that all of us were girls may have provided some consolation for the smaller number she wound up with.

Even as my mom embraced women's rights, she was out of step with many of her fellow feminists, who regarded motherhood as something that oppressed women.

The giant cork board in our family room was covered in political buttons featuring the popular feminist slogans of the day:

- Uppity Women Unite;
- ERA Won't Go Away;

- Don't Call Me Girl;
- Anything Boys Can Do, Girls Can Do Better;
- Eve Was Framed;
- Keep Abortion Legal;
- When God Made Man, She was Only Joking;
- Trust in God — She Will Provide;
- A Woman's Place is in the House— and in the Senate.

Many celebrated the power and beauty of sisterhood: Sisterhood is Blooming; Sisterhood is Powerful; A Worldwide Sisterhood for Equality. None, in my recollection, celebrated moms.

But my mother saw no contradiction in her dual roles as a mother and a feminist.

She felt responsible for creating a more just world for us, her daughters.

Continuing to give birth to daughters and calling that feminism was one of the many ways over the course of her career that she customized a larger movement to accommodate her personal choices.

It also helped insulate her from criticism on issues like abortion rights, which she supported.

Abortion opponents found it awkward to attack someone who, on a personal level, was so very "pro-life."

She enjoyed defying the odds and defying expectations, and as her daughters we enjoyed her enjoyment.

When anyone marveled to us that we were a family of seven children, all girls, and asked whether we wouldn't like a brother (this happened a lot) our standard reply:

"Not until the ERA is passed!"

My mom was born in December of 1941, three days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Her father had his own business at 84th and Halsted making patterns and molds for heavy industrial equipment and also, for a time when they were in fashion, the wood side-paneling for cars known as Woodies.

My mother's mother, who was trained as a home economics teacher, had stopped working briefly when my mom was born but returned as part of the war effort, enrolling my mom in a nursery school that had temporarily opened up at her school to entice women into the job market.

This early version of gender equality was a defining theme of my mother's childhood.

When women won the right to vote in 1920, her grandmother became an election judge.

Prior to her own career in politics, that was the extent of my mother's family's involvement in civic life.

Smart, strong-minded Irish-Catholic nuns ran the all-girl schools she attended: Mother McAuley High School and St. Xavier College, where she earned a liberal arts degree with a chemistry focus, graduating in 1962.

After a year as a teaching assistant in chemistry at Northwestern University she went looking for a job, which, she explained in her [oral history for the University of Illinois at Springfield](#), took a while.

Prospective employers, she said, "would just look at me and think here was a young woman that had all these years of Catholic education and was reasonably attractive and undoubtedly was going to get married and get pregnant and quit."

Eventually she landed a job as information director at a chemical research company located on the edge of the Lake Meadows apartment complex.

In 1963 she married my dad, Anthony Catania, whom she'd met at an intercollegiate Glee Club event, and the couple moved to the complex.

My mother was an only child and my father was the third of nine.

Both wanted a large family and in the summer of 1969, with my mom expecting baby number four, my parents moved out of the Lake Meadows apartment and bought a townhouse four blocks west, in South Commons, where my mom would live for the next 47 years.

Like Lake Meadows, South Commons was specifically designed and marketed as an experiment in interracial living, an antidote to Chicago's legacy of bigotry and racist real estate covenants.

It was also the result of so-called "slum clearance", which wiped out large swaths of housing in the historically Black neighborhood spanning Bronzeville and Douglas.

Glossy color marketing brochures trumpeted "a different way to live in the city," with images of white couples and Black couples strolling the verdant grounds.

"Imagine. Living in your own suburban home just five minutes from the Loop. Growing up in an environment of trees and grass and playgrounds safely away from street traffic. In a total community where you can get to know your neighbors, where everything you need is just a short walk away from your home. That's what townhome living is all about in South Commons."

What came next set the stage for my mom's dramatic about-face, from technical writer to crusading feminist.

Her company hired a new manager with no science degree and little experience, and she soon learned that the salary of this junior male employee, whom she'd helped train, was double hers.

“It was my first real contact with the reality of men being paid higher salaries than women in cases where the women were at least as competent as the men,” she recounted several years later in a WFMT radio interview with Studs Terkel.

“I thought only really paranoid, cynical people thought that way, but all of a sudden it happened to me.”

In the Terkel interview, she described her initial interaction with women who identified themselves as “feminists”, at a meeting of the National Organization for Women.

“When I got there I found that these were nice, clean, well-behaved people with whom I could identify,” she said.

“Unlike the image I guess I had from reading about people in the newspaper who were feminists.”

Suddenly, she realized the women of NOW were pretty much just like her, and would provide a network of support to guide her.

So she quit her job, and embarked on the transformation that would change her life.

With help from NOW, she filed for unemployment benefits, with a claim of sex discrimination, the first such work-based claim ever filed in the state of Illinois.

It was then that she learned that the state legislature was set to consider repealing a law that cut off unemployment benefits for women for three months before they had a baby and a month after.

The law claimed women were not fit to work during that time.

My mom found this absurd.

Having never set foot in the state legislature, she decided to make the journey to Springfield to testify for the law’s repeal.

My mom relished telling this story, which she shared with me many times.

This is how she set the scene: she was 29 years old, visibly pregnant and dressed in a mini skirt, informing the all-male, cigar-puffing panel that there was no legal, medical or ethical reason that women in good health should not be considered capable of working until their due date, if they so chose.

“Is this a labor bill?” one joked.

“Maybe we should consider pregnancy an industrial accident that women have doing their jobs,” another chimed in.

Fortunately, the bill scraped through to the full committee, and my mom once again made the journey to Springfield to testify.

This time she was mentally prepared for the boorish sexism, though not for the committee member dozing through the proceeding.

That, she was informed, was Genoa Washington, one of the first Black graduates of Northwestern Law School who had gone on to a solid political career.

Washington had been a pioneer.

Now he was dying of cancer, and his illness was preventing him from performing his legislative duties.

As it happened, Washington served the 22nd district, where we lived.

And he was running for re-election.

The bill she was advocating for eventually passed into law, albeit in modified form—it did not repeal the previous law but put the onus on the employer to demonstrate that the pregnant employee was unable to work.

The female legislators who’d sponsored the bill encouraged my mom to run for a seat in the legislature.

The thought, outlandish as it seemed, had its appeal.

The salary was \$17,500 a year, the work was part-time, and my mom was unemployed.

“It’s not easy to find another job when you have charged your previous employer with sex discrimination,” my mom observed in her oral history.

My mom called a neighbor who was active in political campaigns for advice.

“I stood in my kitchen holding my telephone in my hand for about two minutes while he laughed,” she said in her oral history.

“If she was determined to go ahead with this cockamamie scheme, he suggested she join the GOP.



At the time, the Illinois House of Representatives employed what was known as cumulative voting to elect three legislators from each district. In a sort of long-standing “gentleman’s agreement,” typically two came from the majority party and one from the minority party.

In Chicago, the majority party seats invariably went to Democrats, who were just as invariably part of the political machine headed by Mayor Daley.

Her advisor explained that if she filed as a Republican — which, don’t get him wrong, was a shot in the dark— people wouldn’t laugh at her quite so much as if she attempted to run as a Democrat.

The suggestion gave my mother pause.

As a lifelong South Sider, being a Democrat was as natural as breathing.

Both of her parents were active in labor unions.

But, ever the pragmatist, with a clear goal and a higher-than-average tolerance for discomfort, she concluded that yes, she could justify running for the state legislature as a white female Republican in a nearly all-Black, nearly all-Democratic district on Chicago’s South Side.

By my mom’s account, she’d included my dad in this decision.

For his part, my dad said the first time he heard anything about it was when she told him she needed a check for \$50 to print petitions.

The next step was to get the blessing of the Republican ward committeemen, a couple of whom showed up at our house and swilled two-thirds of a bottle of bourbon before naming the price for their backing: a whopping \$100 for each of the district’s 153 precincts, or more than \$15,000.

Even if my parents had been tempted to pay up, they didn’t have that kind of cash and politely declined.

In any case, it’s likely the committeemen knew my parents couldn’t meet their price, staging the visit to gauge the level of threat my mom might present.

Perversely — though less so in the bizarre land of Chicago politics — one of those committeemen was the incumbent.

The very same Genoa Washington who was dying of cancer and who had snoozed through my mother’s legislative testimony.

To win votes, my mom decided to track down the scattering of Republicans in the district and personally persuade them to go to the polls.

She spent two months combing through paper records, a grueling process that yielded a scant half-dozen registered Republicans per precinct.

She and my dad and a few volunteers proceeded to call each of them from a makeshift campaign headquarters in our living room.

On those calls, she shared her platform: to be responsive to residents and not beholden to any party or ward committeeman, and to publish a regular newsletter that would describe how to access services for housing, food, tax relief and other support.

Modest goals.

But on Chicago's Black South Side no state legislator had provided such services or produced such a newsletter.

Registered Republicans expected to be ignored, and the outreach garnered a positive response, with some agreeing to meet my mom, hold coffees at their homes and introduce her to other potential voters.

At the urging of my mom's new NOW friends, Gloria Steinem lent her support.

Before long, my mom's campaign drew the attention of the Republican ward committeemen, and suddenly three additional Republicans filed petitions for the seat.

My mom and her team got one candidate disqualified for round tabling, a time-honored ploy consisting of the same few names signed over and over on the nominating petition.

A second opponent was never seen or heard from by anyone, including newspaper reporters who were so desperate to track him down they called my mom asking if she knew how to reach him.

The third rival did little to advance his campaign.

On April 5, 1972, primary day, my mom won 39 percent of the vote to Washington's 50 percent. The two other challengers divided the remaining 11 percent — the committeemen's meddling had succeeded in steering those votes.

No matter.

Second place was all she needed to make it to the general election the following fall.

Then, three weeks before the November 7, 1972 election, Genoa Washington died.

The Republican committeemen immediately replaced him with one of their cronies.

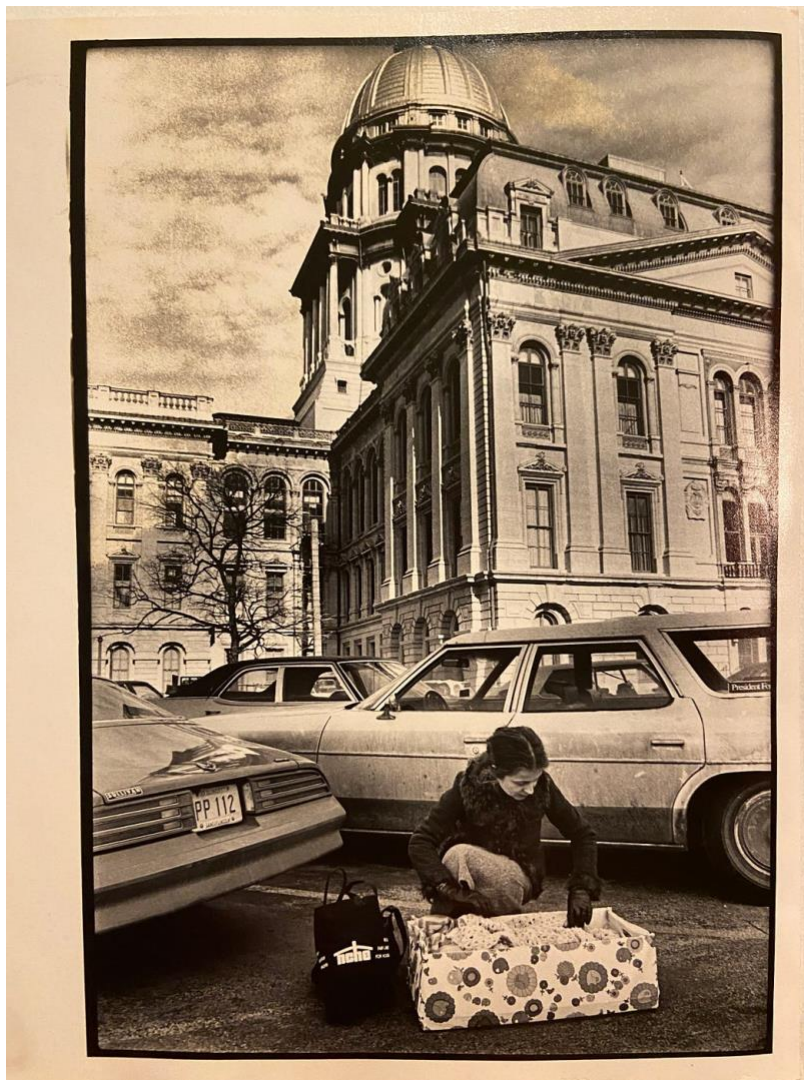
But when election day arrived my mom prevailed.

This first legislative victory, in the fall of 1972, launched an all-consuming phase of her life.

She'd gone from being unemployed (after working 9–5 a few blocks from home) to a job that regularly took her hundreds of miles away for days at a time.

When asked years later if she had any regrets about her time in office, and whether she would have done anything differently, she said no. "I worked very hard," she said.

"I wouldn't have changed that either, though that was a strain on my family."



*My mom outside the Illinois Capitol in Springfield with Maggie in her car bed next to the family station wagon. PHOTO CREDIT: Dale Wittner*

It's one thing to get elected. It's another thing to govern.

When newly elected Representative Susan Catania, age 31, arrived in Springfield charged with representing her South Side district, population 190,000, most of her colleagues were not inclined to take her seriously.

There was no such thing as term limits.

Once elected, most of the pols stuck around until they died, as her predecessor had.

Her presence, it was assumed, was dumb luck. And she was female to boot, one of just eight women in the House, out of a total membership of 177.

Her male peers referred to her condescendingly as Susie or Dearie.

One of her few female colleagues told a reporter she was frequently treated "more like a pet poodle than a legislator."

When a women's bathroom was installed, the men dubbed it "Lottie's Potty," after Lottie O'Neill, the first woman elected to the Illinois General Assembly.

[My memory is that Susan spearheaded the effort to have a ladies bathroom installed at the back of the House chamber.]

My mom took it in stride.

As promised, she opened a district headquarters and hired an office manager who spent much of her time helping senior citizens and disabled people fill out tax relief applications, an effort that brought back millions of dollars to the district in much-needed help with rent and food.

She installed an office line in our living room.

There was no answering machine, so any hour of the day or night her constituents could call and talk to a human being, albeit sometimes a very young one.

My mom trained my sisters and me to answer the phone "Susan Catania's office, may I help you?" and take thorough notes.

Beholden to no one and with nothing to lose, she soon became known for her willingness to take unpopular stances.

Though many of those efforts failed to change laws, they raised the profile of important issues and bolstered the standing of communities long ignored or shunned.

She introduced gay rights legislation, championed gun control and was the first Illinois legislator to sponsor the Freedom of Information Act, all of which fizzled.

Other efforts did pan out, including income tax reform, a compensation plan for crime victims and legislation that led Illinois to become the first state to designate a state holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

She helped revise the state's public aid code and sponsored bills that provided emergency state aid for Cook County and Provident hospitals.

In the case of Provident, the first Black-owned and operated hospital in America, she joined with then-legislator and later Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in co-sponsoring a bill that saved it from shutting its doors permanently.

In all, over 50 of her bills became law.

She was also quick-witted in floor debates, her skill in political theater flustering her targets and delighting their foes. In one instance, she supported a bill that would divert coal tax revenue away from Cook County, which included Chicago, to several counties in Southern Illinois, after the sponsor told her it was one of the few sources of revenue for his district.

My mom's vote led the majority leader to accuse her and some others of vote trading, which he referred to in the floor debate as "prostitution."

Hearing this reference, my mom took to her feet and turned on her mic.

"If the speakers who were talking about prostitution wanted to know what prostitution was all about," she said, "maybe they should go and ask some of the women who had to be prostitutes over the centuries to support their families."

Pause.

"But if I wanted to take lessons in vote trading (Pause)... I would ask my majority leader."

At which point another legislator walked over to my mom, raised her right hand high in the air and yelled, "The Winner!"

Another time she'd proposed a bill to make Susan B. Anthony's birthday a commemorative holiday in Illinois.

Such a designation would require teaching about Anthony in the classroom, but would not mandate a day off.

My mom argued that the holiday would help create a role model for girls.

As my mom recalled, a fellow legislator stood up and said, "Since you think it's so important to have role models for little girls, how about role models for little boys? Why don't you make John Wayne's birthday a commemorative holiday?"

To which my mom responded: "I didn't know you were anti-Indian."

The chamber erupted in laughter and he sat down.

As the debate continued the irked legislator stood up once more and said, "Since you like Indians so much, how about making Sitting Bull's birthday a holiday?"

To which my mom responded: "Is there a Sitting Cow?"

More laughter.

The fight that defined her career was the Equal Rights Amendment, which pledged that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." In the spring of 1972, the day after my mom won her first primary, the Equal Rights Amendment surmounted a 49-year stall in Congress, achieving the two-thirds vote required- for passage.

The next and final step was ratification by 38 (three fourths) of the 50 states.

Within just over half an hour on that day in 1972, Hawaii became the first state to ratify, and others quickly followed suit, bringing the total to 30.

"But then the message unfortunately got out that women wanted to get in there and get male legislators' jobs and bank presidents' jobs and all of those other jobs," my mom said in her oral history.

"And that's when the wall went up."

It was a battle that predated her tenure and lasted through to the end of her time in the legislature.

She was in the gallery the first time the ERA was defeated in Illinois, and on the floor for every subsequent vote. Illinois was one of the states that wouldn't budge.

She read in the paper that when the amendment went down to defeat in Illinois, "the male legislators had cheered and applauded."

By the time she was inaugurated in January of 1973, the ratification momentum for the ERA had slowed considerably.

She soon took up the mantle, becoming the amendment's primary sponsor in Illinois.

Over the years my mom and her (mostly) female colleagues mounted a valiant effort.

They tried and failed every term, employing a range of strategies.

In 1977 all the sponsors of the legislation were men.

Carol Burnett, Marlo Thomas, and Betty Friedan lent their star power to the effort, to no avail.

Illinois was the lone state in the nation that required a four-fifths vote by the house and senate to ratify a federal amendment.

She was actively involved in trying to get that changed so the ERA could pass by a simple majority, butting heads with the speaker of the house, ERA opponent Republican George Ryan, in the process.

As the ERA came up for a final vote, some supporters launched a boycott of anti-ERA businesses.

Others arrived at the state Capitol, chained themselves to the rotunda and went on a hunger strike.

To no avail.

The bill failed, the deadline for ratification passed, and the opportunity was lost.



*My mom with Maggie and Annie on her lap and me holding Maggie's hand in the shag-carpeted living room of our home in South Commons on Chicago's Near South Side. PHOTO CREDIT: Dale Wittner*

As I grew older, I became more aware of the inherent tension between advocating for the needs of a predominantly Black district and fighting for women's rights, which was often perceived in that era as a privilege reserved for whites.

My mom saw no such distinction. "The district I came from required that I concentrate on bettering women's position in society," she said in her oral history.

To my mom, this was the perpetuation of a legacy of failure of equal rights for all people.

"I don't think it's any accident that no state in the old confederacy ratified the Equal Rights Amendment," my mom said.



“And I think it is to Illinois’ everlasting shame that we were the only northern industrial state that did not ratify it, joining ourselves to the confederate states and three western states.”

Whatever my mom’s own views on the matter, race became an obstacle at key moments during her service, sometimes losing her important potential supporters.

The Chicago Tribune, at the end of a long and glowing appraisal of her work in the legislature, declined to endorse her for a second term because she was white.

Years later, looking back on my mom’s tenure, one long-time independent activist explained why some Black leaders in the community opted not to support her.

He conceded that she “voted a good, solid, liberal independent line” but maintained that my mom took a seat that could have been put to better use.

“We should have found a Black independent rather than a nice white lady,” he told a reporter for Chicago Magazine.

“Especially one who had no political experience whatsoever or any history of activism.”

The main question reporters asked my sisters and me during my mom’s legislative tenure was whether we missed our mom when she was away.

Actually no, I’d say truthfully.

I considered the arrivals of each of my three youngest sisters as wonderful and exciting, and, with my mom’s work schedule, very much an obligation shared by each of us, a perception that my parents encouraged.

That was part of the big-sister deal, and I embraced it.

The combination of responsibility and minimal oversight suited me, just as public service suited my mom.

As an added bonus, over Spring Break my sisters and I would join my mom in Springfield, working as honorary pages on the House floor.

This meant sitting up at the front of the chamber near the dais, under a giant light board that corresponded with the seats of the legislators, and waiting for a light to go on.

Once that happened you’d zip over to the corresponding seat, switch off the light and offer your services, which typically ranged from retrieving a can of pop from the machine in the hall to making copies or delivering a note to another person elsewhere in the chamber. In return we would receive a tip.

Much to my amazement the standard was a dollar, a veritable jackpot.

By the end of the week I was addressing my colleagues by name and remembering how they took their coffee.

It must have been amusing to some of them, to have the daughters of the outspoken feminist Susan Catania engaged in the highly gendered task of coffee fetching.

My mom suggested that we limit our efforts to the Republican side of the aisle, but in my bipartisan zeal to augment my savings I'd scurry back and forth, happy to accommodate anyone with an extra dollar.

As the ERA headed to defeat my Mom's legislative career was also winding down.

The state legislature was changing its rules — no longer would someone in the minority party de facto be guaranteed a seat.

From now on you would have to win outright.

At the same time the lines of the districts were being redrawn to favor the machine.

My mom knew that in order to be re-elected as a liberal Republican her district had to include a greater proportion of the well-to-do white liberals who lived along the lakefront, and she worked hard to try to get the new district drawn in her favor.

But, ever the maverick, she lacked the political capital to realize her plan.

She was elected for the last time in 1981.

In the decades after, she went on to a second career, earning a Masters Degree in social work from the University of Chicago and working for the Department of Children and Family Services and Department of Human Services until her retirement.

She survived breast cancer and bone cancer and settled into a rhythm of life that suited her in the family cabin on Cranberry Lake, purchased by her parents when she was a little girl, and where my sisters and I spent our childhood summers.

She would drive down to Chicago to visit family, as she did this Thanksgiving, spending the holiday with my sister Amy and her family.

For her next trip, she had plans to fly to Los Angeles to visit my sister Rachel and me and our families to celebrate what would have been her 82nd birthday this Sunday, December 10.



*My mom with me and my daughter Genevieve, one of 13 grandchildren and the oldest granddaughter, in Los Angeles in June 2023 on the day of Genevieve's graduation from UCLA.*

On hearing that my mother had died, someone asked me for my favorite memory of her.

The first thing that popped into my head was her laugh.

My mom was a serious and driven person.

She also had a great sense of humor and a rolling, joyful laugh.

My delight in hearing it was magnified by its stark contrast to her typical deadpan demeanor.

I have many memories of her sitting at our kitchen table talking on the phone, often to reporters, in long and rambling conversations punctuated with that laugh.

No wonder I became a journalist.

Her death was not the end we would have wished for her, or one she would have wanted for herself.

But she died in a place she loved, after living her life exactly as she wanted.