



Remembering Geraldine Ferraro, a Pioneer

Anthony J. Tamburri (March 31, 2011)

The Geraldine Ferraro funeral will be held today, Thursday morning, in New York City. She passed away on Saturday at the age of 75. In 1984, the congresswoman from New York became the first female vice presidential candidate

Geraldine R. Ferraro passed away Saturday, March 26, after twelve years of a valiant struggle with blood cancer. Mother, teacher, congresswoman, and vice presidential candidate, she did it all! She may very well be remembered most of all—prominently, I suspect—for her role as the first woman vice presidential candidate on a major party ticket. She will also be remembered, to those who knew her, as a sincere, candid, warm-hearted person, someone who was firm in her convictions, articulate as very few could be, and determined to be sure that everyone got her/his chance in life. This came through in all of her roles, from private citizen to public servant.

Geraldine Ferraro will also be remembered as a steadfastly proud Italian American. She championed her Italian-ness always, second to no one else in her adult life. It was the topic of conversation the first time she and I spoke in spring 1984; unbeknownst to many at that time, she was being vetted as possible candidate for vice presidential candidate, and I was teaching Italian at Middlebury College. We spoke at length about our Italian/American community at large, how it was not as united as we might have so desired. Indeed, she was to experience such seeming dis-unity during and after the 1984 presidential campaign, when allies of her political opponents began to toss about those all-too-familiar unseemly suggestions and innuendos about her Italian background. She responded with firm yet courteous indignation, underscoring all along her steadfast pride in her family's history, their many accomplishments in spite of the equally numerous obstacles, and in her pride as an Italian/American woman, someone who was able to grow and develop into a consummate professional, be it in the role of public service in the first part of her career or in that of private, legal counsel in her later years.

Geraldine Ferraro was a pioneer, to be sure. She broke both gender and ethnic barriers before many others. Indeed, those who followed were able to move forward precisely because she had been there first, to burst through those glass ceilings that others could not smash previously. As the first woman, and Italian American, to be a candidate on a major party ticket, she is remembered surely for the first more than the second, or so it seems. Let us in the Italian/American community now be sure that she is equally remembered as the first Italian American as well. Furthermore, let us Italian Americans, in our enormous debt to Geraldine Ferraro, seek to learn from her historical, ethnic ground-breaking and her desire for unity, as she so suggested we do, in her 1985 lecture to the Coalition of Italian American Associations.

More about Geraldine Ferraro

[Italics: The Italian American Magazine: September 2010](#) [1]

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