

# Eulogy for Alice Wolf

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*January 31, 2023*

I wasn't prepared for how painful this goodbye would be...and someone reminded me that unimaginable grief is the cost of love. I loved Alice Wolf, my mentor, and my friend. I know you are here today because you loved her as well. I struggled to put these words together at first. Can you imagine how daunting this is? How does one eulogize and capture the breadth and depth of the life of Alice Wolf? A woman whose life's work and mission have always centered on the disenfranchised and most politically vulnerable among us. A woman who always spoke truth to power and then charted a course toward action and change. How do I eulogize a woman who has been the single most impactful person in my own life (one that helped me chart my own course)? So when Alice asked me to speak today... Well, we all know that NO ONE says no to Alice.

Stuck in the depths of my own grief, I felt paralyzed. How would I do her justice in this one eulogy? I realized I can't; it's not possible. We will all walk out of here and, through our grief, our hearts and minds will speak to each of us, recalling the stories that are not heard today but continue to capture more of why she was a force for good, for love, for justice, for equality...always ahead of the times. I hope you will continue to retell and share those stories for as long as possible. The stories are the ones that have made it possible for her beloved Cambridge community to have a high bar for our progressive and inclusive values and the aspirations we have yet to reach.

When she asked me to speak, I, of course, asked her, "What would you like me to say?" She responded, "Oh I trust you, you will be fine, you will know what to say." Two things are true: Alice has repeatedly gifted me with her confidence and trust, and, of course, we talked about some of the things I should say. I asked what she wanted people to remember and what she was most proud of. I will share some of what she wanted me to share and a little more of what I think we might want to remember and celebrate.

First, and it will not surprise some of you here today, she was very proud that, as Mayor, she opened City Hall to host what would become the first annual Pride Breakfast. In our conversation, she was clear that her commitment to the LGBTQ community was about ensuring that all members of our community would be visible and uplifted. Of course, she would go on to successfully lead the City to adopt domestic partnership benefits for City employees, and then later as State Representative she

would help strategically lay the foundation for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. I won't go into detail, but if you were an advocate or legislator, then, you know how central her role was behind the scenes. (I encourage you to tell those stories.)

She sighed as she said to me people today (younger folks) probably think the concept of domestic partnership is archaic. But she knew then it wasn't to City employees and their spouses who could not secure healthcare and retirement benefits.

Alice couldn't bear to passively live in a world where people were not recognized and honored for their full humanity and could be diminished, disenfranchised, or denied resources and opportunities based on their immigrant status, sexual identity, race, or ethnicity, or because they lived in poverty. This drive to enfranchise and have clarity on what equality means was her North Star, rooted in her own immigrant story that fled the persecution of Nazis and landed her in Massachusetts with her parents.

I met Alice as a Junior in high school. If she introduced us, then you know exactly how we met because she loved to share the story of me storming her Mayor's office (I don't remember it this way, but let's be honest, her memory was always better than mine, and it certainly resembles a likeness of who I was at 15 years old) throwing down condoms on her desk and asking if she was going to support us (a group of 7 or 8 girls who wanted to help our peers prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS). Remember, this was at the height of the AIDS epidemic when people were dying every day. We wanted CRLS to make condoms available, and Alice agreed! She thought that the High School should provide condoms to help students protect themselves, along with information. She did not center herself; she provided a safe haven, literally and figuratively. She and her staff would drive some of us to the speaking engagements and stand with us in front of hostile members of the public. I can not begin to tell you what it meant for a teenage girl growing up in Cambridge public housing to catch the proud glimpse of the Mayor as we used our voices to call for change. This story would not only change the course of my life, but in many ways, embody Alice Wolf's life, always ready to uplift and empower others. I assure you the idyllic bubble of our progressive community in the 80s was not in consensus with our actions. It was divisive and intimidating to a group of high school girls trying to educate their peers about the prevention and transmission of HIV/AIDS. She didn't flinch. We are all familiar with those moments when Alice didn't flinch.

She also shared another moment of great pride for her as a new legislator, and I was there to witness it unfold as her legislative aide. As a new Representative, she staunchly opposed changes to a state law that would reduce educational resources for

children in schools by weakening the Special education laws in Massachusetts. Her not-so-quiet resistance required Speaker Finneran to walk into room 348 and count votes. I watched some try to dissuade her; she didn't flinch.

Alice was a savvy and strategic politician. She didn't suffer fools and be forewarned if you underestimated her. While she may have arrived at the State Legislature at the age of 66, giving the appearance of a seemingly nice liberal senior/elderly woman, people who didn't know her thought they had her figured out. What her colleagues and several Speakers would learn was that she was skilled and seasoned. Just ask Governor Deval Patrick how it felt to have Alice wait him out and refuse to leave his office until he talked to her about budget issues regarding families in need of emergency shelter. (I later recalled and confirmed that this occurred on Christmas Eve, which was Alice's birthday).

This woman cut her teeth in local politics, sometimes with great joy and other times as a fierce negotiator, with Mayor Al Vellucci and former Councillor Bill Walsh. Alice took notes not just from those she agreed with, but especially with those she sparred with. Alice sat in the legislative seat of Former US House Speaker Tip O'Neill and the State House of Representatives Speaker Charlie Flaherty – and she was more than ready and worthy of this seat and knew how to navigate the politics of the Massachusetts Legislature successfully.

And for as tough, principled, and fierce as she was, she was also kind, funny, concerned about the happenings in your life, and was a great dancer – ask anyone who attended a Democratic State Convention. I am not ashamed to say that in my 20s, I left the party for bed before Alice... more than once.

If you are here today, it's very likely you worked alongside Alice and championed legislation that changed people's lives. She never forgot who she was fighting for, and it's why she was so fierce and strategic. Sometimes her political acumen meant she took votes that resulted in uncomfortable conversations among some of her supporters. She never hid behind those moments; she was clear and transparent about the art of politics and her goals were always to center the needs of children, families, immigrants, the elderly, tenants and people without shelter, and people who needed leaders to care and win.

We know that she fought to preserve the homes of people in Cambridge who faced eviction under expiring use policies, alongside them as their Representative and their partner.

She successfully shepherded the passage of Chapter 222. This groundbreaking school discipline law interrupted the school-to-prison pipeline in Massachusetts and became a

model for the rest of the country, making school suspension a last resort and requiring that all children must continue to receive an education even if they are expelled. In her own words, "If a child is not in school, they cannot learn."

Alice ushered the passage of Cambridge's Sanctuary City. She knew firsthand that immigrants fleeing persecution needed safe refuge – without one, she would not have lived. Alice led the Voluntary Desegregation of our Cambridge schools and pushed our community to be accountable for what equity really means: the same is not equal, especially when talking about systemic racism

A strong advocate for our safety net hospital, the Cambridge Health Alliance, Alice understood who was being cared for at our safety net hospital and was relentless in supporting them.

Alice was proud to be a voice for those society tried to marginalize and ignore. But she didn't settle for being a spokesperson for a point of view; she was committed to ensuring that people had not only their own seat at the table but that it should be the head table.

Having met Alice in high school, I would go on to work for her in my 20s as her legislative aide, manage her campaign for reelection, and, with her support, run and get elected to the Cambridge City Council. I eventually succeeded her in the legislative seat she vacated. I can't begin to imagine where my life would be in the absence of this remarkable woman who mentored me, tolerated me, gave me the benefit of endless patience and grace, and – probably most importantly – allowed me to see a future self in her eyes.

What an extraordinary gift it was to have a boss and mentor (we were not quite friends yet) who allowed me to challenge and debate her as I was a young adult trying to figure out who I could be in the world and sometimes trying to tell her what she should do. (There are some of you in this room who witnessed the joy of those exchanges). For 35 years, our relationship grew. What started as a mentor and boss now became colleagues and friends. As we both aged over the decades, our relationship deepened. I now looked to her for advice as a working mom trying to make the best choices for my children while also deeply invested in making sure all parents had the resources to make the best choices for their kids. Alice never separated what she wanted for her family, my family, or your family from what she believed all families deserved to make their best choices.

I can share with you that as Alice was leaving us over the last several weeks, she continued to think about the needs of others. To the staff at Mass Advocates for

Children, she was still talking about your upcoming meetings and instructed me on the importance of bills that we are working on together.

She was uncomfortable and angry that the level of care she was afforded in her final weeks was not the baseline care for everyone in need. It won't surprise you that she offered to help make introductions to influential union leaders who could help the nurses who were caring for her organize. I promise you that in her final week, she still had strong opinions about local and state politics and people.

We have so much work to do if we are going to see the seeds she has planted in all of us grow. Alice will measure our success by our ability to improve life for immigrants, children, people in poverty, and anyone whose dignity, ability, and potential is being compromised, regulated, or suppressed.

I loved her deeply for 35 years, and my children and husband, I will continue to love her and her beautiful, loving husband, Bob and their family. For as long as I can breathe, I will work to live up to her expectations that we must do better every day to make life better for those who have been disenfranchised and diminished alongside them and with them. Her faith and work have allowed me a kid from Cambridge who grew up in public housing to stand with you today and continue to make sure her fight is our fight for a world that is worthy of all of us... not just some of us.