



## Women Who Have Made A Difference



WRITTEN BY  
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ESQUIRE

**M**arch has been designated by every U.S. President as Women's History Month since 1987. It started with a week in 1978 and caught such traction that by 1980 President Carter designated March 2-8 as National Women's History Week. He said this in his message to the nation:

*From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well.*

*As Dr. Gerda Lerner has noted, "Women's History is Women's Right. – It is an essential and indispensable heritage from which we can draw pride, comfort, courage, and long-range vision."*

My great-grandmother, Nonna, lived with us in Longport when I was growing up. She was my mom's dad's mother and came to the United States when she was 14. She and Nonno (Italian for grandfather) had a bed and breakfast in the Catskills called Gatta Farm. What they didn't grow on the farm, they bought fresh at the market and were very successful. I remember even as a child going to their home and enjoying her life stories while the smell of freshly made gnocchi washed over me. Her hugs were the best and made me feel safe and loved.

Grace Anselmo D'Amato, my dad's mother, was a hard worker out of necessity. Her great-grandparents came from royalty and her parents travelled to the U.S. for vacation. Her life drastically changed when her mom died and she and her brother were placed in an orphanage. Mom-mom worked hard to educate herself grammatically and taught herself how to play the piano. She taught her children, including my dad, Paul, that **"education is the one thing no one can take away from you!"** Grace Anselmo D'Amato went on to publish three books, the most notable of which is *Chance of a Lifetime*, which highlights the 500 Club and Atlantic City, when she was referred to as the Naughty Queen.

My mom, Sandi Gatta D'Amato, is the most influential person in my life! She loves me and my sisters, Ava and Ashley, unconditionally. She never tried to change us and always encourages us to do our best. She would tell us that we **"can do anything a man can do, but better."** My mom's dad, Louis, was hit by a tree in a lightning storm and died when she was only 8 years old. Her mom took on two jobs to financially support my mom and her older brother, leaving my mom to take care of the house, cook the meals and walk miles to school in the snow. My mom worked and studied hard, and while she grew up hundreds of miles away from my father, she too understood the value of education. She knew the only way to escape the drudge of the factory town she lived in was to get a scholarship to college. Back in the '60s young women only had a chance of getting a scholarship at a women's college. Thankfully Wilson College had the wherewithal to see the intelligence and work ethic my mom gained from her parents.

She met my dad (a love story for another article) and they were married right out of college. She worked to put him through Georgetown Law School while they were living in Washington, DC. When they came back to the area, she worked at Glenn Insurance and then took off a few years to have and raise me and my sisters. When my youngest sister, Ashley, was old enough to go to school full time, my mom went to work as the bookkeeper at my father's law firm, all while volunteering her time on the Board of Atlantic Cape County College, as President of the Linwood PTO, and coaching the Linwood Panthers Cheerleaders, just to name a few. I love that she continues to work at the D'Amato Law Firm today – her office is right next to mine. ☺

I am proud, comforted, encouraged, and honored to have come from a line of strong, smart, hardworking women such as these! I thank my foremothers for being awesome! I can only hope I make them proud with the work I do for my clients and as a member of the Bar, the charitable work and volunteering I do for my community, and raising my 3 boys to honor and respect women. 🦋

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