



I'm going to read to you an open letter to my daughter Kate who is living in Amsterdam now.

Dear Kate,

As I prepared to speak in honor of Women's History month at Tapestry's Sunday service, I immediately reflected on the role that the women in our family played when it came to women's rights.

They did not play big roles, like Alice Paul who organized protests and even went to jail for the right to vote. But they did not sit on the sidelines either.

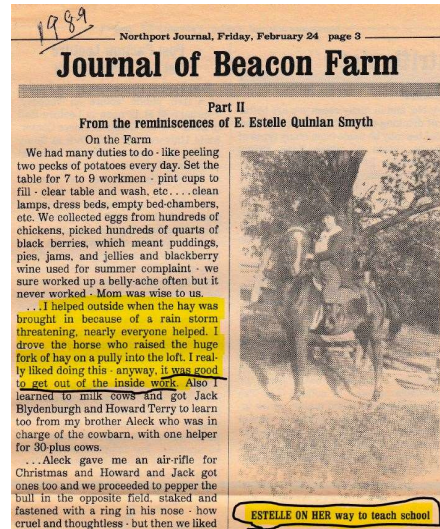


Did I ever tell you that my dad told me that his mom, marched in the Women's Suffrage March in New York City in 1915?

Now – when I asked my cousins if any of them might have any photos of her in the march, or a news clipping – they did not. And actually they had not heard this story about her, but my brother Neil had, so I'm not just imagining it.



First Northport High Girls  
Basket ball Team - 1909  
won Town Chappan ship



My cousins said they were not surprised by this story.

They remembered how Grandma Smyth had graduated from college and was the first woman physical education teacher in Northport, Long Island – and how she rode her horse from school to school to teach PE.

This after she played on the first girls basketball team at Northport High School – winning the championship in 1909. She's pictured here holding the ball.

Cousin Chris said “My memory of that wonderful woman was she was much more of an educator than an activist.” He said: “She just did what she wanted, social norms be damned. I do remember when she started rooting for the Mets -now that was a big deal.”

I will explain....this was a big deal because she used to be a Yankee's fan and even took my dad out of school to see Babe Ruth play for the Yankees.



My Cousin Kim said Grandma was on the school board of Northport – despite the fact that all her kids went to Catholic school from Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Kim said “I think Grandma was a woman ahead of her time ..... She was - an extremely well-spoken woman with the funniest sense of humor and the greatest belly laugh.”

I wonder how much my Grandma Smyth would be laughing now if she saw the state of women’s reproductive rights – and all the attacks there are on them.

I guess in some ways I’m not surprised that my cousins had not heard the story of our grandma marching for woman’s suffrage - because I think in general the older generation of women did not talk about what they accomplished.



A case in point is your Grandma Smyth, my mom. It was only in the last year of her life that I started to ask her more about her early years. It was then that I learned that she was the first to start a sex education program in Stockton Unified School District in the 1960's. This was her TAKE-HOME PROJECT coming out of her participation in President Johnson's War on Poverty Community Action training.

Instituting a sex education program back then was controversial. She even had to present it to the school board.

I think your Grandma would be pleased to know that unplanned pregnancies are at a 30-year low. But I think she would be alarmed at the increasing threats to the gains we made with respect to women's reproductive rights.

## THREATS TO WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS



Targeted Regulations of Abortion Providers (TRAP laws)

- Facility requirements
- Hospital privileges

Title X Gag Rule

Child abuse laws applied to pregnant women

Personhood measures

Catholic medical system prohibitions

Birth control opt-out

Our rights are being threatened on a number of fronts.

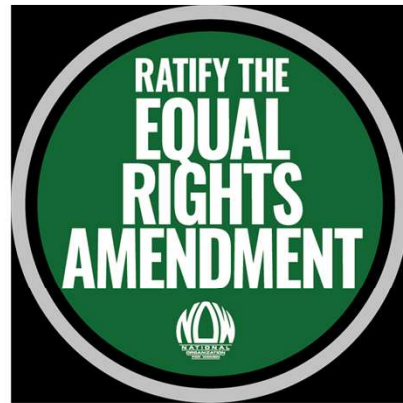
- There are the “**Targeted Regulations of Abortion Providers**” - or **TRAP laws**, that often apply costly facility standards to abortion clinics or require the doctors who perform abortions to have hospital privileges. But they can’t get the privileges because the procedure is so safe, they can’t generate enough patient admissions to the hospital to qualify for privileges.

The **result of the Texas TRAP law was a tripling of the number of women whose closest abortion clinic was MORE than 100 miles away.**

Though the Texas law struck down 2016, Louisiana’s almost identical law is to be reviewed again by the Supreme Court - with a different make-up of justices.

There are other threats that are not so much in the news.

- The Trump administration has issued a “**gag rule**” that bans doctors in the Title X program from giving women information about abortions.
- 23 states and the District of Columbia **consider substance use during pregnancy to be child abuse**, and 3 consider it grounds for civil commitment. That means women are being arrested – even when the babies are born healthy.
- “**Personhood**” **measures** are interfering with decisions about birth control, fertility treatment, management of miscarriages, and access to abortions.
- **1 in 6 hospital beds in the US are now under Catholic medical system control** – and in some areas it’s 1 in 2 beds. The bishops issued directives that prohibit staff working in their institutions from counseling about contraception, abortion, assisted reproductive technologies and end of life care.
- And, coming closer to home for YOU, there is a move to **let employers opt out of providing birth control in their health insurance plans**. And allowing **pharmacists to not fill birth control prescriptions for religious reasons**.



"I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality."

Alice Paul- Interview, 1972

I am reminded of that 1946 poem by the German Lutheran pastor – who talked about not speaking out for the socialists, the trade unionists or the Jews, when they "came for them" - because he was not one of those people, but how when they came for him, there was not one left to speak for him.

Kate, we who are more privileged need to speak out for those who are less so.

We need to be brave like Alice Paul, who took a more radical approach to fighting for Womens' suffrage. And she did not stop there. She was the one to first propose the Equal Rights Amendment back in 1923.

It was introduced in every session of Congress from 1923 until it passed in 1972.

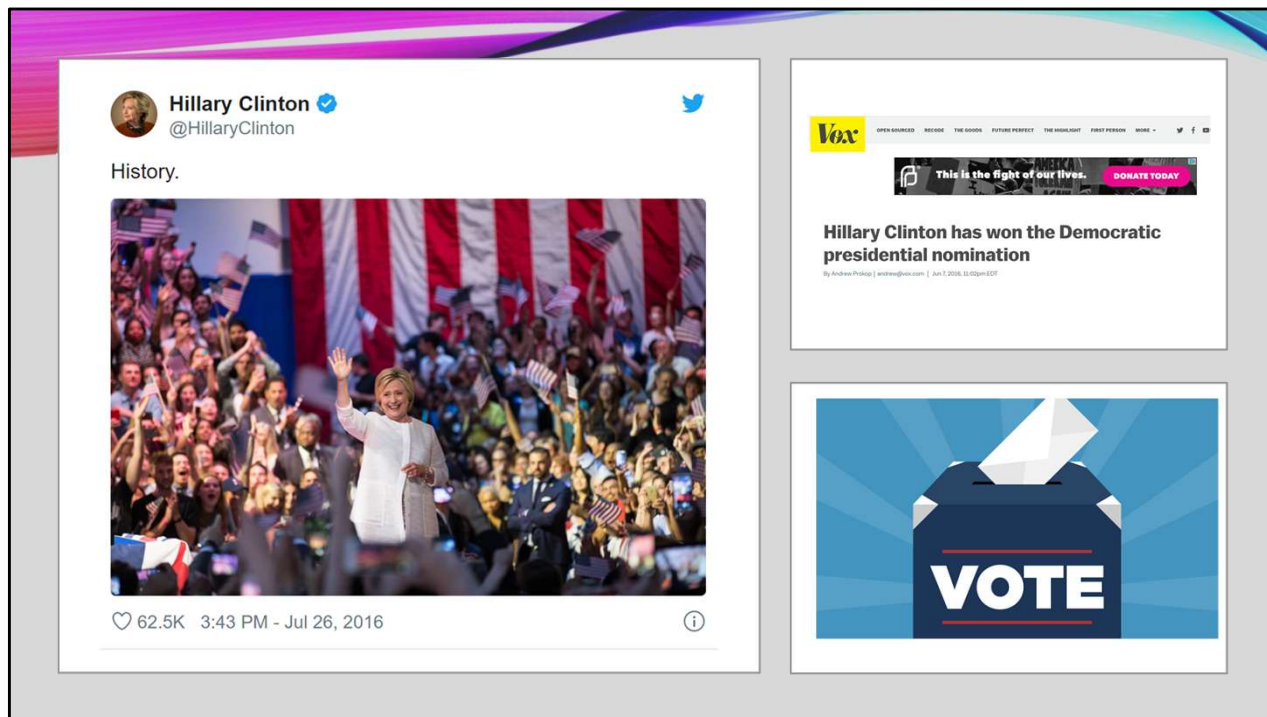
Recently Virginia was the last state to adopt it. But, who knows if Congress will extend the 1982 deadline. And what about the 5 states\* that have attempted to withdraw their approval of it?

The ERA is simple but profound: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Women should be represented within our constitution. Protection there is more permanent.

And, according some law experts, the ERA could also implicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity as well, offering protections to gay and trans people regardless of their gender.

\*Idaho, Kentucky, Nebraska, Tennessee, and South Dakota have attempted to withdraw their approval of ERA



I remember when you told me you had decided to vote for Hilary Clinton over Bernie because you had just watched a video that made you realize how big a deal it was for a woman to get to be a presidential nominee. I thought, “I didn’t teach Kate enough women’s history. She should have known that without the video.”

We won’t have a woman to vote for in this presidential election. And though you now live in Amsterdam, and voting overseas is a hassle, I trust you will take the time to vote. Your ability to do so has been hard fought. And, I hope you will continue the tradition of your great grandma and grandma – working for the rights of women, and for social justice in general.

Much love, Mom