

To the editor:

I enjoyed the recent Prairie Progressive article on Gloria Steinem written by Camille deJorna. Obviously Steinem influenced deJorna's thinking and career very positively and I have no doubt she passed her own strength on to many other women.

I began journaling again not so long ago, and found Ms. Steinem's death sent me into a world of memories of when I was a very young and very poor single mother. The feminist leaders of the sixties and seventies created an infrastructure upon which were built lasting programs that offered support for women in need.

Iowa City was a leader in reforms that were happening across the nation. The Women's Research and Action Center, the Domestic Violence Intervention Project, the Rape Victim Advocacy Program and Emma Goldman Clinic are the four that first come to mind for me. Why? I benefited from all of these centers personally, but I know I am merely one of thousands of women who did. Where did I begin to read about our feminist leaders? No computers, I read at the WRAC.

In Iowa we began to elect women who brought about, successfully and unfortunately unsuccessfully, the kind of legislation that improved women's lives that not so very long ago were invisible or ignored by men in power. Two that are foremost for me are Comparable Worth, championed by our own Minnette Doderer, and the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The latter, so dear to women all over the country, should never be allowed to die. We have recently been removed from constitutional protection, it is far past the time to establish the permanence of our constitutional rights.

Have we finished the work led by feminists like Ms. Steinem, and my personal favorite Marion Wright Edelman? No, not even mostly. But we are no longer in fear of action and we will never be fearful again. Perhaps removing the paralyzing fear that women before Steinem shared, is Steinem's greatest legacy.

I was not afraid to stand on the Pentecrest with a thousand outraged, angry, women. They were outraged by the Supreme Court's ruling on abortion. But I began to weep. Most of the women were so young. How could we be back here again? Has the full strength of the feminist movement been diluted? Had my own generation failed to build upon the diligent work of the women before us?

The feminists of a half a generation before mine ignited a smoldering cultural shift that allowed me, and thousands of other women, to find a way out of an ugly bias that suppressed women's, especially poor women's, opportunities to have successful lives.

I urge my sisters to reflect on Gloria Steinem's legacy not only as a well deserved national and global leader, but also how we saw the evolution of change in our own lives and communities.

Ms. Sarah C. Swisher
Retired Nurse
Iowa City