

# Debbie Metke: Anita Zeidler worked for a better life

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“Sometimes you have to live someone else’s life.” Those were the last words spoken to me by a terrific activist the day before she suddenly collapsed and died this Labor Day while staffing a United Nations Association table at Laborfest.

Anita Zeidler was the brilliant, hard-driven daughter of Milwaukee’s beloved (and controversial) Mayor Frank Zeidler – the last of the three socialist mayors who helped make our city unique. The frugal and ethical Zeider brought honesty back to city government, grew the city’s size, multiplied the park system, presided over a factory boom, and brought crime and poverty to a new low. Mayor Zeidler followed in the dreams of our city’s first socialist mayor who said:

“We wanted our workers to have pure air, we wanted them to have sunshine, we wanted planned homes, we wanted them to have living wages, we wanted recreation for young and old, we wanted vocational education, we wanted a chance for every human being to be strong and live a life of happiness. And we wanted everything that was necessary to give them that—playgrounds, parks, lakes, beaches, clean creeks and rivers, swimming and wading pools, social centers, reading rooms, clean fun, music, dance, song and joy for all.” Mayor Emil Seidel

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Daughter Anita grew up with awe and pride, but also protectiveness of her father, who was initially feared by the 1950’s McCarthy-era public which confused “socialist” with “communist”. She worked tirelessly for decades as a professor of Educational Psychology and ran city-wide organizations such as the United Nations

Association, the Public Enterprise Institute, the Milwaukee's Socialist Party, the Zeidler Institute and more. But those who knew her feared overwork and strain.

The day before she died, she called me and we talked for over an hour. She sighed, "I've got so much to do that I can't even organize my Dad's papers." I reminded her that yes, her father was amazing and legendary, but she was exceptional in her own right and had so very much to offer the world. I said, "I hope you are taking some time to enjoy life. We can never accomplish everything. After all, when Einstein died he had a desk full of paperwork."

"Sometimes you have to live someone else's life", were her last words to me.

Less than 24 hours later the slim and energetic Anita was gone, suddenly dead of undiagnosed heart disease - too busy to get a check up. She left our city shocked and lost, in need of many to now fill her shoes.

Yes, our world needs saving in so very many ways. The amount of work can seem endless, but we need to pace and yes, enjoy ourselves for the long haul. Maybe Anita got satisfaction in her tireless efforts, but I think we would have all enjoyed seeing an often happier and refreshed friend as the work to improve our lives continued.

Dear friends, yes, pick up a cause and help make the world better, but please smell those roses today - for yourself; and for Anita.

— *Metke, of Franksville, is an activist with the United Nations Association - Greater Milwaukee, Peace Action Wisconsin and Citizens for Global Solutions.*