

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Get mad, and get even!

Alaska's long-time senior senator, the late Ted Stevens (1968-2008), had a vicious temper. He could erupt in a split second. Turnover on his staff was constant for few folks would take his berating their competence for long.

He was demanding, would not accept excuses and expected one never to make the same mistake twice. His caustic criticism often was aimed at the press. He rarely hesitated to call a reporter and let them know how badly they'd screwed up..

Behind all the anger, bluff and bluster, though, there was one decent person who had a tender heart, truly cared for those less fortunate and was devoted to his wife, Ann, and their children. He was a man of his word, a tireless advocate for Alaskans and a formidable adversary. He rarely carried a grudge, with one major exception-----his senatorial colleague, Alaska's junior senator, Mike Gravel.

He hated Gravel, and with good reason Stevens truly believed, and it was plausible, that Gravel brought about the situation that led to the death of Ann.

Gravel, born in Massachusetts, went to Alaska with the not so secret desire to achieve high public office. He drove a cab for awhile but soon got into real estate and was successful enough to seek office. An intelligent, charming fellow, he was liked well enough by his House colleagues to be elected Speaker.

In 1966 he tried to parlay the Speaker post into election as Alaska's sole member of the House but was defeated in the Democratic primary by Ralph Rivers.

In August of 1968, though, he shocked many Alaskans by upsetting the venerable Ernest Gruening, one of Alaska's last territorial governors and, along with Bob Bartlett, one of the first two Alaskan senators. Gruening, who will forever be remembered as one of only two sagacious votes against LBJ's Tonkin Gulf resolution authorizing the president to

do whatever he had to do in Vietnam, was in his early 80's. To his regret he ignored Gravel and did little campaigning. Gravel went on to win the first of two terms in November.

Twelve years later Gravel himself was knocked off in the August Democratic primary by Ernest Gruening's grandson, State Rep. Clark Gruening. Gravel had by then alienated many Alaskans but the clincher was the move Stevens quietly organized to have a massive Republican turnout vote in the open Democratic primary for young Gruening. Stevens exacted his revenge.

Had Gravel been responsible for Anne Stevens' death? You be the judge.

Throughout much of 1978 Congress had been wrestling under a deadline to settle the *quid pro quo* in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act which had enabled the oil industry to move forward with the construction of the Trans-Alaska pipeline. Section 17-d-2 of that law called for the designation of up to 92 million acres of public land to be set aside in the four preservation systems---national parks, wilderness areas, wildlife refuges and wild rivers.

The House had passed its version easily, but the Senate was struggling. With a deadline looming, in mid-October negotiators from both the House and Senate, along with the Carter Administration's Interior Department, hammered out a compromise. Senator Gravel, who previously had told everyone he would not stand in the way, suddenly reversed field and blew up the agreement by threatening a floor filibuster. He would not even agree to an extension of the deadline.

Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus, knowing that Gravel was a liar, was prepared for just such a move. He had already prepared for President Carter's signature a declaration placing most of the previously identified "d-2" lands into National Monument status and protected the rest with his withdrawal authority under the 1976 BLM Organic Act.

It then became necessary for the Alaskan delegation to meet with the main Alaskan business opposition group, the Citizens for the Management of Alaskan Lands (CMAL), to devise a new strategy in response. The strategy meeting was scheduled for Anchorage on December 4, 1978.

As the Learjet carrying Senator Stevens, his wife, and others was landing at the Anchorage airport a terrific cross-wind hit the plane flipping it over. Ann died from a broken neck along with five others.

Senator Stevens survived along with CMAL chair Tony Motley. Stevens, in a display of true grit, had his injuries quickly addressed at a nearby hospital, then immediately caught a flight to Denver so he could personally inform Ann's father before the news was released to the public.

Stevens knew neither he nor Ann would have been on that flight had his colleague not blown up the negotiations. From that day forward he held Gravel personally responsible and vowed vengeance. Controlling his anger, less than two years later he had the pleasure of getting even by ensuring Gravel's defeat. Stevens not only got mad, he did indeed get even.