



Mourners at the Washington National Cathedral in Washington stand April 27 as the casket of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is carried during a funeral procession. Albright, the first woman to serve as U.S. secretary of state, died March 23, from cancer, according to her family. She was 84 (CNS/Reuters/Leah Millis)

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She was remembered as an immigrant, a refugee, the little girl fleeing danger who would later come to champion the ideals of the country that took her and her family in.

Madeleine Albright was eulogized April 27 at a funeral service at Washington's National Cathedral by notable friends and family gathered to remember the happy

but also turbulent times in the life of the former U.S. secretary of state, the first woman to hold that position.



Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright answers questions from Georgetown University students in Washington in this April 7, 2016, file photo. She died March 23 at age 84. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

"Mom took a particular interest whenever I let her know that I was visiting refugees or working to help girls get a better chance for an education. Often, her voice would grow a bit deeper, the conversation slower, and I could tell that she was reminded of being an 11-year-old immigrant girl who survived the Blitz, moved around repeatedly, left her homeland and arrived in the United States in 1948 with her sister, brother and parents, seeking refuge and wanting a better and safer future,"

said her daughter Alice P. Albright during the service.

It was an experience that marked the life of the native of what was then known as Czechoslovakia. Albright was born in its capital of Prague, and later followed in the steps of her diplomat father Joseph Korbel.

"Albright says she was raised as a Catholic from earliest memory," says a 1997 article from The Washington Post, recounting what little is known about her Jewish family becoming Catholic, a move likely taken to escape persecution. Her family's Jewish roots for a long time were unknown to her. She later became an Episcopalian.

In 1998, as secretary of state, she met Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, where they both talked about their East European roots and expressed hope for change in Cuba after the pope's visit that same year, said an archived article from The Washington Post.

Though her mother, father and siblings were able to escape the fate that befell millions of Jews under the Nazis, The Washington Post report found that some members of her extended family were victims of the Holocaust.

And perhaps that's why she cared so deeply about those facing precarious conditions in far-off lands, even as her immediate family found security and refuge in the U.S.

"Even though she became one of the world's top diplomats, Mom never forgot where she came from, and how precarious circumstances were when she first arrived in the United States. This explains why Mom never took anything for granted and was always grateful for everything," said her daughter Alice.

"Your mom was a force, a force of nature. With her goodness and grace, her humanity and her intellect, she turned the tide of history," President Joe Biden told Albright's three daughters at the service.

He recalled her tireless work to maintain and expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a means of stability in Europe and the world.

"It was not lost on me that Madeleine was a big part of the reason NATO was still strong and galvanized as it is today," Biden said.

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Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recalled during the service one of the last conversations the two had days before Albright's March 23 death at age 84.

"She continued to issue blunt warnings about the dangers posed by authoritarianism and fascism with undeniable moral clarity," Clinton recalled, adding that the world and people in the U.S. should rally "against (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's horrific invasion of Ukraine and the urgent work of defending democracy at home and around the world."

On Feb. 23, even as her health was deteriorating because of the cancer that eventually took her life, she found time to pen an opinion piece for The New York Times titled "[Putin Is Making a Historic Mistake](#)."

"Ukraine is entitled to its sovereignty, no matter who its neighbors happen to be. In the modern era, great countries accept that, and so must Mr. Putin," she wrote. "That is the message undergirding recent Western diplomacy. It defines the difference between a world governed by the rule of law and one answerable to no rules at all."

President Biden also recalled her impact on encouraging women to join the highest levels of government and said "she made sure that young women knew they belonged at every single table having to do with national security, without exception."

"Today, across our government and around the world, Madeleine's protégés are legion," he said. "Many are here today, each carrying within them a spark lit by her passion and her brilliance."

Albright earned a doctorate from Columbia University in 1975 and later became U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and U.S. secretary of state. She also served on the board of directors for the Council on Foreign Relations, and served as a longtime professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, among her many accomplishments. She also became an author and champion for women in politics.

But above all, what came first was family, Biden said.

"Nothing mattered to Madeleine more than the family — nothing," Biden said. "Madeleine had the same rule that I do and others here do. No matter what's

happening in my day — as President (Barack) Obama can tell you — or who I'm meeting with, if one of my children calls, I take the call. She was the same way. Anne, Alice, Katie and her grandchildren — each of you — each of you is literally a tribute to her enormous capacity to love."