

## Catherine Ann Savino Obituary



Cathy Savino, clipper of coupons, aficionado of Law and Order, champion of the underdog and tequila connoisseur, died on Friday, August 1, 2025. Cathy, the oldest of four siblings, was born Catherine Ann Savino on September 25, 1952, to parents Mary and Patrick Savino, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. A true daughter of Connecticut, Cathy attended both Western and Eastern Connecticut State College before beginning her world travels. She lived in Panama, Thailand and Morocco over the next nine years. Upon her return to the U.S., she completed her master's degree in public health at Emory University, which she reminded us, is "the Harvard of the South".

Cathy's first job in public health was for the American Public Health Association. She then joined the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as an institutional contractor, first working on fighting malaria and then on the Patrick Leady War Victims Fund, where her badge read "Cathy Savino, War Victim". These jobs took Cathy around the world to "off the beaten path" travel destinations. If she visited Paris, London or Rome, it was on her way to Afghanistan, Rwanda or Belarus. By the time she retired she had visited 99 countries. She got her hair washed in 82 of them - it was a Cathy thing. Her specialty was war-torn areas. That, and bringing back gifts for her nephews and nieces. The poster of Daffy Duck with a prosthetic leg and warnings in Vietnamese to avoid landmines was a family favorite.

Cathy loved a bargain and had no compunction about buying a mismatched set of dishes, three glasses out of a set of four or a single steak knife. There was no amount of food too small for a doggie bag. This was offset by her tremendous generosity. She would drive hours to purchase a special Lego set for a nephew, often making friends with the sellers and inviting them to join her family for Thanksgiving dinner – for the next 10 years. She was willing to drive anyone to the airport. At any hour of the day or night.

She is pre-deceased by her sister, Patricia, and survived by a brother and sister, Thomas and Mary, who realized early on they could never live up to her stellar qualities. She loved them very much even when they refused to follow instructions from the first-born. Although her siblings could be obstinate, her nephews and nieces were a joy. There was nothing she wouldn't do for them including attending endless soccer matches, plays, performances and parties. She went out of her way to find special activities for them. The piranha pedicure is a standout. No toes were lost.

Cathy is also survived by an incredible number of close friends, who cannot be named for fear of missing somebody. But no description of Cathy's life would be complete without recognizing her lifelong friend, Mary Ellen Hass - her daily confidante, travel companion and soulmate.

Cathy achieved a long time dream in 2020 when she purchased a beach home on the Eastern shore. In typically Cathy fashion, she made friends with all the neighbors in short order and semi-adopted the teen-age summer help. Someone will have to tell the young Ukrainian waitress Cathy befriended that she can't make their family reunion in Kiev. She struggled with making big decisions so it was with great fanfare that Cathy announced the completed installation of the pool she had always wanted. She enjoyed two weeks with her new pool but took even more pleasure in seeing the photos of her guests enjoying it just last week.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you do something nice for somebody else unexpectedly, and without explanation.

#### **- Cathy and International Aid -**

During her early travels, Cathy lived in Thailand for four years. While there she helped implement The Orderly Departure Program office of the U.S. in Bangkok. ODP was created in 1979 under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as a means for Vietnamese refugees to leave their homeland safely and be resettled abroad. Prior to the implementation of ODP, tens of thousands of Vietnamese were fleeing via boat. Under the ODP, from 1980 until 1997, 623,509 Vietnamese were resettled abroad of whom 458,367 went to the United States.

Upon her return to the States and completion of her master's degree, Cathy began her distinguished career with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in the early 1990s. Over the course of more than three decades, she played a pivotal role in the Agency's work through a series of institutional contracts that supported Congressional earmarks. Her work had a profound and lasting impact on some of the world's most vulnerable populations—civilian victims of war, persons with disabilities (including wheelchair users), vulnerable children, and survivors of torture and trauma.

In close collaboration with USAID official Lloyd Feinberg, she played a pivotal role in the design and implementation of one of the Agency's earliest institutional support contracts, a model that set the standard for countless similar agreements over the next 35 years. As a contract project director, Cathy possessed a remarkable talent for turning ideas into action, advancing initiatives with determination and meticulous attention to detail. Her

ability to translate vision into reality made her an indispensable partner to forward-thinking USAID leadership.

Cathy's contributions were especially influential in support of the Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund, a Congressional earmark dedicated to assisting civilian victims of conflict and other persons with disabilities worldwide. Through these early institutional mechanisms, her work contributed to USAID's ability to mobilize critical expertise, technical consultancies, and logistical support. This, in turn, helped catalyze pioneering advancements in the global field of assistive technology, setting new standards for the provision and maintenance of prosthetics, orthotics, and wheelchairs in conflict-affected regions.

An expert in the complexities of USAID contracting, Cathy was widely respected not only for her technical mastery, but also for her unwavering commitment to learning. She continually honed her skills through advanced training and coursework, ensuring she remained a trusted resource in the ever-changing field of federal government contracting.

Beyond her technical expertise, Cathy was an exceptional mentor and leader. She guided, supported, and empowered numerous administrative staff, consultants, and technical professionals throughout her career. Her deep institutional knowledge, strategic foresight, collaborative spirit, and innate generosity earned her the admiration of colleagues and the affection of those she supervised.

Cathy's legacy is one of dedication, innovation, and compassion. Her contributions have left an indelible mark on USAID's work and on the lives of countless individuals in developing countries around the world.

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