Adrienne Larkin: “Serviam Then”

Adrienne and son, William

In the fall of 1967, Adrienne Larkin, SAS ’68, received a letter addressed to “Student Body President” from a Marine lieutenant asking for Christmas cookies for the men in his rifle camp serving near the DMZ (demilitarized zone) in South Vietnam. Adrienne read the Marine’s letter at dinner (attendance was mandatory) and posted it on a bulletin board.

Students lined up five-deep to copy the Marine’s address and then waited on lines for the pay phone booths in their dorms to call families to ask them to participate in the “Bake-In.” Adrienne learned four months later in a thank you note from the Marine officer that many dozens of packages of home-baked cookies, in Christmas wrapping paper, arrived by helicopter to that base on Christmas Eve. He also sent her photos of the Marines opening the cookies.

In a recent episode of a podcast series she does with her grown son Will Grodh, “Talking Politics with Mom,” Adrienne discussed that spirit of giving among CNR students, even at a tumultuous time when resistance to the Vietnam War was building on college campuses across the country. The young Marine, a recent graduate of nearby Manhattan College in Riverdale, wrote that he was aware of the dissent and protests about the war in the United States, particularly on college campuses. His letter continued, “I hope you will excuse my confidence, but I am familiar with the spirit of CNR.”

Adrienne said that many CNR students at the time questioned the war, and some in fact had brothers and other close relatives fighting in it. “They wanted to ask those questions (about the justness of the war) but they were never disrespectful to our military.”

Of the student body’s overwhelmingly generous response to the Marine officer’s request on behalf of his men, she said on the podcast, “I was very proud of my classmates. They were able to separate the warriors from the war.”

The story of the CNR students’ *Serviam* didn’t end there. Fast forward to spring 2018.

When Adrienne, a resident of the Bay area of California, was preparing to travel East for her CNR 50th Class reunion in June 2018, she came across the thank you letter she had

received from the Marine officer in 1968. Curious if he was still alive, she did many internet searches and enlisted the help of a local Marine. He came up with an address and Adrienne wrote a letter, enclosing a copy of his thank you letter from 1968. She didn't hear anything for several months. Then on the evening before she was leaving for the East Coast and her CNR reunion, she heard the ping of an incoming email on her computer. It was from that Marine, who had retired as a Colonel. Ironically, he was preparing to see many of his Marines at a reunion that September and promised Adrienne he would share her letter with them. Not only did he have copies of the photos that he had sent her of the men's delight when they saw the wrapped boxes of cookies, he had kept a notebook in which he had written the names of all the CNR students who had sent the cookies to soldiers they had never met, fighting a war with which many of them disagreed.

Last December, both on the podcast with her son and in an article posted on the Daily Kos, Adrienne reflected about the impact that act of service of baking and sending cookies to a company of U.S. Marines in Vietnam before Christmas 1967 had on her life and that of many of her CNR classmates.

She wrote in the article, "It reminded me in the most personal way of the power of a simple request, of asking for help when you need it most, and asking for help from a most unlikely place. And when you ask, very often help will be given. And joyfully.

"And it reminded me somewhat proudly that we responded with the love and caring that our parents and our faith had taught us. And those small acts of kindness rippled out across a half century, helping in some small way to heal the infinite wounds that terrible war inflicted."

Here are the links to the Daily Kos article and the podcast:

https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2024/12/22/2293291/-50-Years-ago-at-Christmastime-A-marine-in-Vietnam-asked-for-my-help-Help-was-given

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmkE1AVctGo