

May 20, 1984

Dear Denver,

My name is May and I am a student in Dr. Walter Capps' religious studies class on the Vietnam War. I was at last Thursday's panel discussion and, like all of the classes, it really made me think. Listening to you made me think even more.

I am writing this letter because I want you to know how important that class is to me. I am a biology major and will graduate in June but never has any class made such an impact on me as this one. As most of my generation, I was completely ignorant to the 60's era and the Vietnam War before this quarter. I knew nothing of the history of Vietnam or the realities of the Vietnam War in Asia and in America. At the Welcome Home Celebration on Saturday you mentioned the stigma Vietnam veterans have. Well, I had all those stigmas too. But now, listening to all of you, listening to Dr. Capps and reading as much as possible has changed all of that. I am learning, learning so much about everything - the war, the world, politics, the American society and about myself.

I felt your anger Thursday. I felt Dan bitterness Thursday. I don't completely understand it because I am not a veteran, but I do understand that it is totally justified. I am not sure if I interpreted this correctly, but I felt that much of your anger comes from the frustration of not knowing whether all this talking and lecturing and rehashing is worth it for you, the veterans, or for us, the other generations. Well, I think it is. I think it is so very important.

In our microcosm here on campus, students often almost forget that there is an outside world where life is not so comfortable. You are helping us to remember. You are helping us to look outside. What you do is also very important to me, personally. I am going to enter medical school in July and have thought a great deal about my goals as a physician. I enjoy helping people but I have often thought that as a doctor I would want to project that energy to people who really, really need help. Hearing the veterans speak, hearing Arthur Blank talk about the Third World, hearing you talk about American materialism has confirmed and strengthened that conviction in me more than anything. You've made me think. You've helped me form a goal and that's important.

I hope you understand what I am saying. All the hell it puts you and the rest of the veterans through to rehash and talk about what you went through and what you are going through now is making a tremendous impact on us. That impact doesn't stop at us either. We constantly talk among ourselves about it. We constantly talk to others outside of class about it. I don't think I am generalizing. I've seen it and heard it and have done it so often myself. That kind of discussion is making our generation think, and the generation older than both of us think, and this is so important for the veterans to get all you deserve, for the future of the American society and for the future of the world, which the United States boldly influences so often. It is also important for the process in which each individual forms and expands his/her beliefs, attitudes and goals. Change is slow but it does alter ignorance.

I also wanted to tell you that I took this class for two reasons - one, because I heard it was very interesting and two, because it filled my last G.E. requirement. As I mentioned before, I knew nothing about the Vietnam War before this quarter and thus had no interest in it. Well, I hope you can see that this has changed. I don't think it is wrong if people take this class to fill a requirement. We're learning about things that we would have never have learned about without this requirement. In a way, Dr. Capps has "caught people off guard." There is no was any student could walk away from a lecture this quarter unaffected. Whether we expected it or not, the class has forced us to think. The quarter is not even over and I feel very different. I wish there was some dramatic way in which you veterans could see the impression you make on us, just so you could know that is does mean something. It means so much.

Don't stop now, please. I want more of my peers to know. I want more of my elders to know.

I was not sure if I should write you this letter but I decided that I would rather let you know that you are making a difference in people's lives, than let that anger I felt from you go unmentioned. I hope I made sense.

Thank you for talking to our class. Thank you for organizing the Celebration on Saturday. I just wish we had done it for you. Good luck. Welcome Home Denver.

Sincerely yours,

May Okihiro

State Bar of Kansas News Press
Sunday, May 27, 1964

Celebration thrilled Vietnam veteran

Editor, News-Press: **An Open Letter to the Community of Santa Barbara:**

The night of May 19 at the Veterans' Memorial Building I had a larger-than-life experience. I cannot speak for all the other Vietnam veterans and their families and loved ones, but all the Vietnam brothers I talked to felt the same as I did about our very positive and successful WELCOME HOME celebration.

Personally, it was the first time I had ever heard, received, and/or felt positive reactions about Vietnam. After 15 years of the opposite reactions, it was absolutely incredible! Emotionally and psychologically it was very heavy and very cathartic to have a room full of people applauding for us because we are Vietnam veterans.

Thanks to everyone who came to the celebration. It was great sharing talk, hugs, dinner, and the awards ceremony with you. Thanks for your warm applause after each Vietnam veteran stood and stated when and where he/she was in Vietnam.

We are healing our wounds, external and internal, slowly but surely. Your support, Saturday night, and in the future, is an essential part of the healing process. As we heal ourselves, so will America heal herself. As we accept ourselves and as we are accepted by our community, we can become a viable, productive, and progressive part of Santa Barbara. Thanks for a beautiful welcome home.

Mike Murdy

418 E. Micheltorena St. No. 6

Santa Barbara News Press
Sunday May 27, 1984

June 13, 1984

Dear Dr. Capps,

Something happened to me this quarter and I feel very different. The feeling come from your class on the Vietnam War - from the veterans and especially from you. It's a strange feeling - kind of frustrating, kind of warm, kind of good. You have taught me so much and given me the opportunity to learn so much about the war, the world, religion, politics, American society and about myself and I cannot thank you enough.

Being a biology major I have had to take so many classes on facts, experiments and the structure of life itself. It's an important part of the academic world and I've enjoyed it but often we, scientists, are left with ^{a view} of living that almost seems to bypass the living person itself. I hope you understand what I am saying. I am just so glad to have had the opportunity to take this class. It had opened my eyes and broadened my awareness of living. I am sad I was not able to take your other classes but I am leaving with the beginnings of a new understanding and I am excited about that.

As I told you, I will enter medical school this July. I wrote this in my letter to Denver that I have thought often of my goals as a physician. I enjoy working with people but have thought that as a doctor I would like to project that energy to people who

really, really need help. Hearing the veterans speak, hearing Dr. Blank talk about poverty and the Third World, hearing you bring it all together has confirmed and strengthened that conviction in me more than anything you've helped me form a goal and that's important

Thank you for all your time and energy. I think I understand when you said you were glad the class is coming to a close. It has pervaded all my thoughts and it will be a relief (?) to put it a little more towards the side for a while. I won't forget though - no doubt about that.

Thank you for having us over to your home. It was a very special afternoon and I am so glad you decided to go ahead and have it. People still talk about it and all were very glad to have the opportunity to meet and talk to the veterans, to Peter Marin, to Shad and to you.

Thank you for supporting me in getting the "scroll" together. I almost decided not to do it but am very glad it did work out. Thanks for getting the press to come. I know Denver and Buzz and the other veterans really appreciated the exposure. (By the way, I have a new friend - Denver Mills - and that's a real warm feeling)

Finally, I want to thank you for just being what you call yourself - a school teacher. I think that it is through this perspective of yourself, that you have been able to teach us so much with such an impact. You seem to genuinely care about teaching and your students and I think that's great. In several medical school interviews I was asked what I would do if I did not become a doctor. Well, I always answered, "Become a teacher." Teachers have the potential to do so much to really influence lives and open opportunities and minds. This was the best class I have ever taken and you were the best teacher I've ever had and if I do ever become a teacher, I hope I fill my potentials as well as you. What's more, you continue to grow and expand and fill more potentials and that's so neat.

I have given few of my professors presents but I've always given my school teachers tokens of appreciation. You have been a tremendous inspiration. My parents brought these flowers from Hawaii this past weekend when they came for graduation. I am not sure how lively they will be when you see them but oh well.

If it's okay, I'd really like to get in contact with you before I leave for Hawaii to get the addresses of Bill Mahedy, Peter Marino etc. I really

do hope I get to see you again. If you
come back to Hawaii and stop off in
Honolulu and would like a place to
stay or someone to take you around,
please feel free to call.

I hope your early mornings are
always bright. Best wishes.

Love -

May O.

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523-5885

July 3, 1984

Dear Dr. Hammond,

My name is May Okihiro and I was a student in Dr. Walter Capps' Religious Studies 155 class-- American Religion and the Impact of the Vietnam War. I am writing to you because I wanted to let you, the chairman of the department, know how important this class was to me. I just graduated last month as a cell biology major and can honestly say that this was the best class I have ever had. It taught me more than any other class. It made more of an impact on me than any other class. As most of my generation, I was completely ignorant to the 60's era and the Vietnam War before this quarter. I knew nothing of the history or the realities of the war in Asia or America. But now, listening to the veterans, listening to Dr. Capps and reading as much as possible has changed all of that. I have learned so much about the war, the world, politics, religion, the American society and about myself.

This was my first religious studies class and the first class I have ever taken with a "first person" type of format in which the people involved, were the materials we studied. It did seem different at first but I now realize that this is the best way for us to learn about such a topic. The Vietnam War and other current political/social matters are all so new and controversial that we need the time and space to listen to those involved, so that we may form our own opinions and interpretations. Myra MacPhearson, in her recent book Long Time Passing, put it best in a quote by Virginia Woolf. "When a subject is highly controversial. . . one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncracies of the speaker."

The impact of the class did not stop at myself. On the last day of the quarter, we presented the veterans who spoke to our class with a giant scroll of messages written by over a hundred members of the class. The messages were very personal, very moving and each expressed feelings for what had happened in class. I would like to share a few of them with you to give you an idea of the feelings and emotions that we went through this quarter.

Thank you so much for sharing yourself and experiences with our class. It has meant so much to me. I will never forget this class and all I have learned. God Bless to you all. Patty

Welcome Home to all of you. Thank you so much for sharing with me some of your experience, your pains, your needs and your desires. I hope and feel this class may have helped you to learn about yourselves as you have taught us to understand about ourselves. This class has truly opened my eyes to something I was very blind to. Thank you for sharing it with me. I will continue to share my new knowledge with others who need to understand. Cheers to you all. Sue

Thank you. You'll never know the impact this class has had on me but you all were a big part of it. Steve

This class is what education is all about. Thank you for your contribution. John

Thank you all for sharing your feelings, emotions and experiences with us. You all have taught me more than a textbook ever could. Welcome Home. Robin

Thank you for the wisdom and lessons only you can teach us. Welcome Home and may peace be with you. Jim

I did not know I would become emotionally involved in this class, but I did. I took this class simply to fill my last General Education Requirement and because I heard it was interesting. I had little interest in the Vietnam War and its repercussions on religion and society because I knew nothing on the topics. Well, I hope you can see that this view has changed. In a way, Dr. Capps "caught us off guard." There is no way any student could walk away from a lecture, much less the class as a whole, unaffected. Whether we expected it or not, the class forced us to think and look at ourselves and our beliefs.

I am realizing now how much time and energy Dr. Capps has put in to make this class possible. From gathering funds for the speakers to the organization of the class structure itself, he has dedicated himself to his work. What strikes me most, however, is his true belief in his job as a teacher and the genuine care he has for his students and the learning process. It is in this perspective of himself and his role that I think he has been able to teach us so much, with such an impact. I will enter medical school this month and being a science major I have had to take many classes dealing with facts, experiments and the structure of life itself. I have enjoyed the courses and think they are very important, but often we have been left with a view of life that almost seems to bypass the quality of living itself. I hope you understand what I am saying. I am just so glad I had the opportunity to take this course. It has opened my eyes to so many things and has broadened my awareness of living tremendously. My only regret now is that I did not have a chance to take other religious studies courses.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am sure that as the chairman of the department you will encounter many negative pressures and I just thought it was important that you hear the positive thoughts, too. I hope the Religious Studies Department continues to support courses such as this class. Good luck in your new position.

Sincerely,

May Okihiro

July 20, 1984

Dear Dr. Capps,

Hi! How are you? I have been meaning to send this letter off to you for some time now but as things go, life got a little busy. I am back in Hawaii now and have already started medical school but I wanted to write to you and give you a copy of the letter I sent to Dr. Hammond, the chairman of the Religious Studies Department. I felt a very strong urge to write to someone after your class and John Simmons suggested Dr. Hammond, along with Chancellor Huttenback. I am sending you a copy of the letter because it is about you, and compliment to you, and I thought you should be one who reads it too. I sent a similar letter to the chancellor. I hope they help you to maintain and/or gain support for your courses. Some of it may sound repetitive of what I wrote to you, but it is truly what I and others in the class felt and I think it is important that the administrators know too.

I also wanted to tell you that the day before I left for Hawaii last month, I saw Denver and he took me to Kerr Learning Resources and showed me the tape you and the veterans had just made with the South Vietnamese veterans. I thought it was very interesting and I think it will be a great addition, and a new perspective, to the study of the War. I am glad I had a chance to see it and hope that it becomes a part of your class next year. Denver said that all of you were going to try to write a grant to get funds for more tapings. I hope that is successful because it sounds like there are some very interesting discussions that could be completed.

I have been talking to many of my friends about the class and two of them have already begun to read your best selling book, the Unfinished War.⁽⁴⁾ One of those friends is especially interested because her father was in the war and her uncle, who was also in the war, just committed suicide this past year. She thinks it is because of the war.....So it continues to come up all over. Maybe I am just noticing it more now.

Other than the study of the Vietnam War, things have been going real well. It is hard to believe I have already started medical school until I look at the stack of books and lectures and then it hits me that I am really here. I am enjoying it though. Our class is relatively small, consisting of 56 people, from ages 21 to 39. There is a nice diversity of people and most everyone seems very energetic and motivated and friendly. I am enjoying the closeness of a small class and the fun of meeting so many new people. I do wish I had a longer break between my undergraduate and graduate careers but.... I didn't and I guess that's okay too.

I did get somewhat of a break. Two weeks before I left California, a friend and I took the train to Oregon and toured the Portland/Coastal regions for a week. It was very fun and I enjoyed the Oregon countryside immensely.

Pam Meeks, who was also in RS 155 and who became John Murphy's friend, wrote me and said she saw you at your teacher's seminar when John spoke. She said it was really neat and mentioned that you even have a teacher from American Samoa. I thought that was funny because my sister, Michele, was also a teacher in American Samoa for two years. And, as a matter of fact, she is

there right now.

I am going to go back to studying. I hope I do get to see you on your next trip to Hawaii in November. If you need me to do anything before your trip, just let me know, okay?

I hope you get somewhat of a break for summer. You seem to work awfully hard sometimes.

By the way, how is Shad Meshad??

Oh, I wrote a thank you letter to Bill Mahedy and just received a very nice letter from him in return. (One other things your class taught me is the power of a letter).

Take care. I'm going to keep in touch, okay?

Aloha,

May O.

July 15, 1985

Dear Dr. Capps,

I received your letter and the newspaper article. Thank you. At first I didn't understand why you had sent me this travel article on Kona but after I had begun to read it, I saw the author's name. I xeroxed the whole page and am sending it back now, before I lose it. (I tend to do that to things that aren't mine.) I'm not sure if James Houston will call. I hope he does but, if not, that's okay too. He seems to know the islands quite well and probably has many people to visit. I'll let you know what happens but thank you for thinking of me.

We started school again last week and are well into acute gangrenous gall bladders and the polio vaccine (Pathology 607 and Immunology 603). I'm glad to hear that you are well. Last week we had to learn to take blood samples from each other. I poked my partner three times (giving him two bruises!) before striking right. Hmm..... I think I have to work on technique. So stay well, I'm still in school.

I'm trying not to get too involved in the extracurricular activities at school but sometimes my mouth won't stay shut. I'm no longer the president of my class (thank goodness) but so far I'm having a real good time.

My trip to the mainland last month was fantastic. It was so good to see you. Thank you for taking the time to "chat" with me, to show me around your home (and roof) and for driving me back to Isla Vista. I'm glad I also had the opportunity to see you "in action" again - in class and at Commencement. A different sort of feeling and energy reemerges inside of me that I don't really feel while in medical school. Does that make sense? You have a whole different awareness and knowledge and I hope to one day have (or gain) a little of that.

I'm at my school-home right now, not at my home-home, which is on the other side of the island. School-home is in Honolulu (which I don't really like) but it's very close to campus and that I enjoy very much. I live with four other graduate students and we seem to all mix quite well. I'm enclosing this address and phone # but I would feel more secure if correspondence keeps going to my parents' home in Kaneohe.

Is John Simmons coming to Hawaii? If he is, please give him both addresses and phone numbers. I would love to show him Oahu, if he has time.

I'm glad I got to see Laura and Mrs. Capps again. Please tell them I said hello.

Have fun teaching this summer but don't work too hard.

Love,

May O.

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Dear Dr. Capps,

July 25, 1986

Hi. It's been a while since I last wrote. I've started a lot of letters which I never completed but I must get this one off to you.

I've thought of you often recently for several reasons. I guess the most prominent is because I finally met your friend Jim Houston. It was quite exciting! I was reading the newspaper on Tuesday evening when I read that he was going to do a reading of some of his works that night at the University. Well, I went and there he was! You had sent me a couple of his travel articles a while back, but hearing him read some of his works was even better. It was very enjoyable, to say the least. Anyway, afterwards I went up and nervously introduced myself.

(... had kind of the same nervous feeling when I met you!) He remembered you telling him about me. We only got to speak for a moment but I'm glad we did meet. He said he was going to Santa Barbara next week and would be giving you a call. I hope he gets in touch with you. Thank you for indirectly introducing me to him. I hope to read more of his works in my spare time.

I guess the other reasons why I've brought you have to do with the class on the war and the veterans.

I'm in my third year now and currently during my 8-week psychiatry rotation.

Once a week we spend the afternoon at VA in Honolulu and a couple of weeks ago I got my first PTSD patient who was in the Vietnam War.

I couldn't help but to think of you and Denver and Bud. This patient was in pretty bad shape... hearing lots of voices, having terrible flashbacks and nightmares. Apparently, a couple of months ago, he was at Tripler Army Hospital, here in Honolulu for a check up when a voice kept telling him to build a bomb and take it back to the hospital. Well... that's exactly what he did! Luckily they found him and the bomb before it was placed but they did have to detonate it. He was treated in the hospital for a while but is now seen at the VA Mental Health Clinic as an outpatient. I'm sure it's similar to many stories you've heard. It was a good experience for me to get a chance to talk to him. I have this feeling I'll see others...

I can't believe I'm already in my third year now. The last year whizzed by. We finished up in May then had 3 weeks to study for the National Board Exams, a 2-day test covering all we learned in the first 2 years. It was the toughest test I've taken yet but I found out last week that I passed. Phew! We had 3 weeks after that to relax then started again. Now we are in the hospital full time. I'm doing most of my work at the Hawaii State Hospital and it's quite an experience. This hospital has the most severe and chronic mentally ill patients and I often feel as if I am in a movie. Many of the patients are extremely psychotic, doing and saying the bizarrerest things. I guess the hardest patient to deal with so far has been a young woman who was my high school classmate. When I knew her in high school she was a bright, normal, cheerful girl. In recent years though, she has developed a personality disorder in which she turns all her fears and stresses inward and self-mutilates herself. Last week she severely burnt her arm.... Anyway, the patients teach us a tremendous amount. It's really interesting and draining sometimes but I do enjoy it.

Are you still making frequent trips to Wash D.C. ? I hope you are. I was ~~was~~ accepted to do an 8-week clinical elective at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland next March - May. If you are in Washington during that period I was hoping ^{that} we could get together for lunch or something; perhaps go to the Vietnam Memorial. I'm really excited about this elective. I'll be working with some of the top people in medicine in the field of Endocrinology. It's also very exciting because I've never been to the East Coast before and hopefully I will be able to spend some weekends traveling about.

I hope things are well with you. I'm sure you are keeping very busy. How is your son Todd. I know it was a while ago but did he recover completely from his pulmonary emboli. I was quite surprised when you wrote to me about that. I hope everything went well... Please tell Mrs. Capps I said hello and John Murphy too. Take care.

Love,
May O.