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May 4, 1989

Dr. Walter Capps
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Santa Barbara, CA 93106

Dear Dr. Capps,

I was a student in your Impact of Vietnam class, Winter 1985. I know your class was, and continues to be, very popular on campus. I always felt good about that popularity because of the relative ignorance that prevails among my age group regarding history, particularly the history that is so recent that it falls between the categories of history and political science (when it comes to teaching and studying). In fact, I took the American history series at UCSB my freshman year because my high school class was so poor. One of the major problems is that classes seem to run out of time after WWII. (Incidentally, my History 17 class at UCSB also "ran out of time"). The result is that there is a group of young people that, in effect, missed the 50's and 60's. Unfortunately, we missed it in life and we missed it again in school.

I'm writing, I guess, just to let you know that the thoughts and feelings that we went through in the Vietnam class remain with those of us who were lucky enough to be there. I thought about my time in your class when I saw the 60 minutes segment last June. And, I've been watching China Beach regularly and many of the issues they address are ones we discussed in class. I've also been reading more books and looking for new movies on Vietnam. All of these interest me, and remind me of the many emotions we explored together.

Mostly, I'm writing because of the Vietnam Memorial which was constructed in the park near the State Capitol. I work in the Capitol building and am able to visit it fairly often. I don't know if you've had a chance to see it, but it's an emotional and inspiring work. As you approach the memorial, there is a map of Vietnam on the ground, done in black stone. The memorial itself has a circular wall, with the names of the California servicemen who were killed in the line of duty etched in alphabetical order, by city, on the outside. The wall is built in several pieces, and between these you can reach the middle where there are several bronze plaques and statues. An American flag stands in the center and a bronze statue of a soldier in fatigues sits at the base. He has a rifle resting against his leg and is reading a letter from home. Along the inside of the wall are several bronze pieces commemorating various people and places associated with the war. One bronze is of a POW at the Hanoi Hilton, and the most recent is a full bronze of a nurse in fatigues attending a severely wounded soldier.

The bronze of the nurse was dedicated last week in a small, but moving ceremony sponsored by Assemblymember Jackie Speier. There were several "Gold Star" mothers in attendance, as well as women who served as nurses in Vietnam. Nancy Giles, who plays Frankie on China Beach was there to receive an award for the producers of the show. Rose Sandecki was there, along with BT Collins. And, in the middle of a sunny day in Sacramento we sang God Bless America and cried just a little bit.

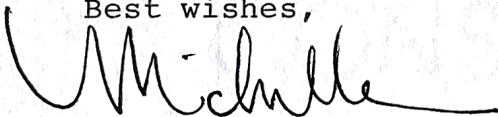
The memorial was first dedicated on December 10, 1989. I took some photographs that day, and have enclosed some of the slides. I'm not a professional photographer, but you'll get the idea.

We always talked about our Vietnam vets not getting their parade, and not being welcomed home. For what it's worth, there was a parade that day in December. We had speeches, and cheering, and a 21 gun salute. And now, we have the memorial.

Thank you, Dr. Capps, for bringing the Impact of Vietnam to the students of UCSB. Your class was by far one of the best experiences I had during my undergraduate years. I didn't learn equations or have to memorize theories, but I learned to be thoughtful of so many issues that I had been painfully unaware of before. I didn't gain something for my career, but for my life.

I hope each class becomes more inspiring for you. You have the privilege of knowing that, due to your efforts, thousands of young Americans out there are thinking differently about Vietnam-- or maybe, just thinking about it at all.

Best wishes,



Michelle E. Robrahn

P.S. Anyone interested in the memorial in Sacramento may contact me in Senator Bill Lockyer's office at 916/445-6671; or, Linda McClenahan, Chair, or Peggy Carretta, Executive Officer, of the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission at 916/327-0077.

Also, I received an invitation from the Alumni Association to join your annual trip to The Wall in Washington D.C. I hope to go one day, but would also like to suggest that you make a donation request along with the offer. I remember we "passed a hat" during class to try to help some of the vets pay for their trip. Like most of the others, I did not have an overflowing budget at the time. I would like to make that contribution now that I can better afford it. Please let me know how I might help.

And finally, I've enclosed some envelopes for donations to the women's Vietnam memorial in D.C. I thought you may be aware of some folks who may be interested.