

JUNIATA - THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

by Jackea Andoniades

My years at Juniata taught me to approach life during every decade with an open mind and a willing heart; to never be afraid to think and to learn.

Who would have thought during our seventh decade of life, 50 years after graduation, we would be living through a global pandemic? These are supposed to be our “golden years”! Maybe I shouldn’t be surprised. After all, the Vietnam war during the late 60’s brought us some extremely turbulent times.

I entered Juniata in 1967, with a laser focus on a medical career. Heck, I even took Latin for 3 years in high school because prescriptions were written in Latin. Little did I know that a required religion course would change my life forever. Topics for papers were assigned at random by the professor. My topic was the Quakers and non-violence. I quickly learned to make a distinction between pacifism and passivism. There is nothing passive about their belief in active non-violence.

That “open mind and willing heart” that Juniata instilled in me in two short years, led me to leave school after my sophomore year in order to work with the Quakers in the hopes of bringing an end to the war. It also didn’t seem fair to me that just because I was female, I didn’t have to worry about getting a low draft number after graduation. Unfortunately, my Presbyterian dad didn’t understand at all why on earth I was dropping out, so I took the bus from my home in Baltimore to Philadelphia to follow up on a flier posted by the Friends Service Committee.



As a Quaker organization, they were looking for volunteers to help with their non-violent activities in their fight to end the war. Imagine my surprise when they rejected my offer of help! Who knew that “prior experience” was required to volunteer with them? But they were kind enough to direct me to Pendle Hill, a Quaker study center opened in 1930 just outside of Philadelphia. There was no direct transportation to their community (Uber what??) so I walked a couple of miles from the train station in my standard attire - loafers and a mini-dress (weren’t they all “mini” in 1969?).

When I arrived at their offices, the director of finance was good enough to meet with me even though I didn’t have an appointment. As luck would have it, he recognized me from his drive into work realizing that he had passed me walking along the road some distance from the community. He decided I must be sincere to have walked all that way, so after listening to my story, he offered me a working scholarship. It was the perfect way to add to what I had learned in that religion course.

A class titled “Non-violence: Strategies and Tactics” turned out to be invaluable. It was quite an experience, learning how to do street speaking standing on a milk crate in downtown Philadelphia. We

also leafleted the Pentagon which led me to an interview with General Hershey, the head of the selective service system. Most moving of all, while standing on the steps of the Capitol in Washington D.C., we read out loud to passersby the names of the American war dead published each week in the Congressional Record yep, the same steps that were charged by an angry mob on January 6th of this year. The purpose of our efforts was not to recruit people to our cause, but to get them to stop and listen, and to think twice about going through their lives with a “business as usual” mindset - to open their hearts - to not be afraid to think and to learn.



And now I come to the most difficult part of this essay. In the 1960's and beyond, men who went to war were spit on and called baby killers. Men who didn't go were vilified and called draft dodgers. Now in 2021 Trump supporters are called Trumpers and Trumpniks. Non-Trump supporting Republicans are called Rinos. Democrats are called Libtards and Socialists. It's very disturbing. We are all Americans. We are all human beings who care about our friends and family. If only there were a way to infuse all Americans with the Juniata tradition of never being afraid to think and to learn.... to live with open minds and hearts.

And if you want to hear the “rest of my story” how I managed to drop out for a year in '69, and still end up graduating in '71 with a degree in Philosophy instead of Biology/Pre-med, then you'll have to come to our 50th reunion in October. Hope to see you there!