

Ann Margret



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Richard, my husband, never really talked a lot about his time in Vietnam, other than to say he had been shot by a sniper. However, he did have a rather grainy, 8-by-10, black-and-white photo he had taken at a USO show. It shows Ann-Margret, with Bob Hope in the background, and it is one of his treasures.

A few years ago, Ann-Margret was doing a book-signing at a local bookstore. Richard wanted to see whether he could get her to sign his treasured photo, so he

arrived at the bookstore at noon for the 7:30 p.m. signing. When I arrived after work, the line went all the way around the bookstore, circled the parking lot and disappeared behind a parking garage.

Before her appearance, bookstore employees announced that she would sign only her book and no memorabilia would be permitted. Richard was disappointed, but he wanted to show her the photo and let her know how much those shows meant to lonely GIs so far from home.

Ann-Margret came out looking as beautiful as ever and, being second in line, it soon was Richard's turn. He presented the book for her signature and then took out the photo. When he did, there were many shouts from the employees that she would not sign it. Richard said, "I understand. I just wanted her to see it."

She took one look at the photo, tears welled up in her eyes and she said, "This is one of my gentlemen from Vietnam, and I most certainly will sign his photo. I know what these men did for their country, and I always have time for "my gentlemen."

With that, she pulled Richard across the table and planted a big kiss on him. She then made quite a to-do about the bravery of the young men she met over the years, how much she admired them and how much she appreciated them. There weren't too many dry eyes among those close enough to hear. She then posed for pictures and acted as if he were the only one there.

Later at dinner, Richard was very quiet. When I asked whether he'd like to talk about it, my big, strong husband broke down in tears. "That's the first time anyone ever thanked me for my time in the Army," he said.

Richard, like many others, came home to people who spit on him and shouted ugly things at him.

That night was a turning point for him. He walked a little straighter and, for the first time in years, was proud to be a vet. I'll never forget Ann-Margret for her graciousness and how much that small act of kindness meant to my husband.

I now make it a point to say "thank you" to every person I come across who served in our Armed Forces.

Freedom does not come cheap, and I am grateful for all those who have served their country.