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Friends & Neighbors: Anne Moore and Sharon Gray

By **Lara Hayes**
Dalton Daily Citizen

Patriotism was everywhere in the days following the terrorist attacks of 9-11. Emotions ran high, and Americans displayed the flag anywhere they could as a sign of unity and love of country. "United We Stand" was the catch phrase.

However, as the Iraq war evolved into a lengthy battle, some Americans' fervent determination began to dwindle until it all but disappeared.

Don't tell Anne Moore and Sharon Gray that, though. The mother-daughter team's patriotism still burns brighter than ever.

Moore, 68, doesn't remember not being patriotic. Her mother, the late Beatrice Richardson, was known for her strong love for country. Richardson wore an American flag pin on her lapel every day. At her funeral in January 2003, the family requested that a flag stand at the head of her coffin in remembrance of her patriotism.

"Mom's patriotism was so passionate it was contagious," said Moore. "I can remember watching parades, seeing the flag go by and standing and saluting. Other people were just standing there. In life you learn to pay attention to what America stands for, and you start to realize the prices that are paid to offer that to us."

Moore, in turn, passed down her passion to Gray.

"When I went to school, we stood up every day and said the Pledge of Allegiance. We had prayer before we had lunch," said Gray, 46. "My most poignant memory was the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. It stuck with me because this is the country I live in and I have a John Wayne attitude. Don't spit on my country."

Gray tried to send things to the troops during Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s but was unsuccessful.

Photos



Anne Moore, left, and her daughter Sharon Gray look through letters and pictures from soldiers stationed in the Mideast. The pair sends supplies needed by American Soldiers via www.anysoldier.com. **None/Misty Watson** (Click for larger image)

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"You have to know how the military does things, and I didn't," she said.

Gray, a self-confessed Fox News "junkie," got the proper instructions after seeing a news report on Fox about www.anysoldier.com. The Web site gives detailed directions on how to mail items to the troops in all branches of the military as well as posts from the soldiers themselves about what they need.

Three or four months into Operation Enduring Freedom, Gray began sending packages twice per month to the troops in Iraq who posted on the Web site. Moore was intrigued by her daughter's zeal for the project and decided to pitch in. The two work on the packages at Gray's home.

Shipping packages to the military is costly, so how do they pay for it?

"We're both Christian women and we tithe to the church, but instead of doing that, we take our tithes and spend it on the troops," said Moore. "They're over there fighting for our freedom to worship."

Moore and Gray try to send items that meet the needs of the soldiers. One of the groups they send to is a group of Marines stationed close to the Syrian border. They have a locker-freezer that they store goods in and do laundry in trash cans and garbage bags.

"We try to send things that remind them of home," said Gray. "Some of them have a microwave, so we sent a bunch of Betty Crocker cakes. They need toiletries and soap because their soaps melt in the heat. We also try to think of things for entertainment, like magazines, books, DVDs and CDs."

The troops were touched by their generosity. Sgt. Dedrick J. Clark with the group near the Syrian border e-mailed them a note of thanks: "Sometimes the news makes us wonder if anybody really cares about us by showing everything that's wrong about the war but never anything right about it ... It's because of friends like you who actually care, which makes it a lot easier for us to do our job."

Area businesses have also gotten involved. Logan's Roadhouse donated 300 bags of peanuts during the holiday season last year. Moore's employer, Burtco Enterprises, provides shipping materials. Other Burtco employees bring books and magazines, condiment packets, plasticware, straws and travel-sized toiletries.

"We get people who say 'That's good that you're doing that' but they never offer to contribute," said Moore. "Americans throw away a bunch of stuff that the soldiers need. We're so wasteful and take stuff for granted."

The duo says anyone can do what they do. All it takes is concern for the troops, a desire to help and assistance from www.anysoldier.com. Area residents may also call Moore at (706) 629-3673 and leave a message.

Gray believes that the ardent patriotism Americans showed after 9-11 faded "because we live in a 'me' society," but that doesn't stop hers from bubbling up.

"Whenever I hear the national anthem, the hair on the back of my neck stands up," she said. "Old Glory may be tattered and torn, but she still flies."

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