

Memory Is the Answer (3/1/12)

"[The observance of Passover] reminds all of us that the struggle for freedom and the battle against oppression, waged by Jews since ancient times, is one shared by people everywhere."

- President Ronald Reagan, on his weekly radio address to the nation, April 2, 1983

Ronald Reagan's religious devotion was the product of his mother Nelle's care and teachings. But Nelle Reagan did so much more than pass her faith onto her son. She turned her son into a soldier for tolerance, acceptance, color-blindness and compassion -- a soldier armed with the tools of peace. To Nelle Reagan and eventually to her son, peace started in the heart and grew outward.

Upon President Reagan awarding him the Congressional Gold Medal, Elie Wiesel said to those gathered for the occasion:

You spoke of Jewish children, Mr. President; one million Jewish children perished. Mr. President, I have seen children being thrown in the flames alive. Words — they die on my lips. But I've also learned that suffering confers no privileges. It all depends what one does with it. And this is why survivors of whom you spoke, Mr. President, have tried to teach their contemporaries how to build on ruins, how to invent hope in a world that offers none, how to proclaim faith to a generation that has seen it shamed and mutilated. And I believe, we believe, that memory is the answer — perhaps the only answer.

So how do we ensure that we never forget, so that we "build on ruins", create hope for subsequent generations and ensure we never come close to repeating the horrors of the past? Luanne Paglione, Principal and Social Studies teacher in the Gifted Program at Woodcrest School in Tarzana, says that character education "must be part of any early education system and must include character examination. After all, you can just *talk* about racism or you can tell your students how, as a college student, a furious Ronald Reagan invited his black teammates to sleep at his family home rather than on the bus after a segregated hotel denied them a room."

Ms. Paglione goes on, "In our study of history at Woodcrest, students learn not only the 'who, what and when', but also the 'why and the how'. They are exposed to the true characters of the men and women about whom they are learning and to the foundations of people who do great things. At Woodcrest, we are conscientious of this fact, and so we take our students to the Reagan Presidential Library every year to expose them to the fact that the accomplishments of great people are based on great character."

You can "meet" Nelle Reagan in the "Foundations of a Leader" gallery at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, a gem of a place, right in our own backyard. From climbing aboard Air Force One to experiencing the anxieties of the Cold War, from meeting The First Lady to understanding Reagan the cowboy...there is so much richness at the Reagan Library for adults and children alike (<http://www.reaganfoundation.org/>).