

A Recipe For Stone Soup

Marianne Larned, a 1973 graduate of UMass Amherst's School of Education, recently visited the campus for the first time in 20 years.

"Seeing old friends and exploring my roots," she said. "A whole flood of memories came back."

Larned is author of "Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories of Everyday Heroes." Based on the folktale of the villagers who made soup from a special rock, Larned promotes the idea that when we each give our gifts, we create a feast for the whole world.

Her work is based on models of innovative education that she first picked up at the School of Education. Larned, who has dedicated her life to building a healthier and more sustainable world through energizing and connecting community leaders, credits the UMass Amherst School of Education with developing and nurturing her global perspective and passion for peace.

"The UMass Amherst School of Education had a huge influence on my life, and I'm very grateful," she said. "It gave me permission to think and ask questions."

Coming to UMass Amherst fresh out of high school in 1969, the relatively sheltered Larned discovered a campus teeming with the kind of social ferment that rocked college campuses in the 1960s. The School of Education, under the leadership of Dean Dwight W. Allen, was no exception, she said: It was a rich learning environment.

"People were thinking out of the box, asking important questions, developing creative projects" she said, noting the contributions of such border-stretching innovators as Bill Cosby, Sidney B. Simon, Jack Canfield, Roberta Flack, and Dr. J. (Julius Irving).

"Our professors encouraged curiosity, to explore what might be possible, what kind of world we wanted to live in," she said. "These were very important questions, questions we need to be asking ourselves today."

Over the years, her work has taken on many forms – educator, health consultant, journalist, and public speaker are among her various roles – but a common theme has developed. Tapping into the business and organizational development skills she gathered in her graduate work, she went on to develop public-private partnerships to address education, health and economic development.

Her curriculum, piloted in the US by the YMCA in 8 states, has been used in 120 communities throughout the world, with after-school programs for high school, middle school,

and elementary school students, but also in jails, churches, and other diverse settings.

Founded in 1997, the Stone Soup Leadership Institute boasts a prestigious advisory council including Honorary Chairman Walter Cronkite and Muhammed Yunus, recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.

She regularly has to practice the kind of "thinking outside the box" that she first saw at UMass Amherst, and it's this kind of thinking that she believes can seed peace throughout the world.

"I think the UMass Amherst system is well-positioned right now to be at the forefront of education in Massachusetts," she said. "People need to be proud of the School – give back, and get involved," she said.

"The next level of teachers coming out of the School of Education could make a huge difference," she says. "The planet is in trouble, big time. It's hard work, but we really don't have a choice."

"UMass Amherst needs to take credit and stand up and prepare this generation of leaders," she said. "I would like to be part of that."



Larned with 2006 Nobel Prize winner Muhammed Yunus