



# My Father's Voice

by Deena M. Beck Ehlert

With supper finished it was mom's time for a break from her children. It was our time to be with Dad. Cindy, my eight-year old sister, got the book while Tom, my six-year old brother, and I (four years old) climbed on our gray couch. Book in hand, Cindy joined us on the couch and we all waited for mom to start the old reel-to-reel tape player. Dad was piloting airplanes in Vietnam for the Air Force. His one-year isolated tour would be over soon and he would be coming home.

Throughout the year of his physical absence, our family received at least one tape a week from dad. Mom played a section to us every day. Dad began each day's session by asking each of us how our day had gone and what we had done. Speaking to the tape machine as if he could hear every word, each of us told him about our adventures. Unbeknownst to us, mom wrote down our responses so dad was kept up-to-date. In the subsequent tape, he praised our good deeds and gently corrected our errors. After everyone told dad their tales, he read to us from the book mom had sent. Cindy turned the pages while Tom and I followed along to his voice. Sometimes dad recorded himself teaching English to Vietnamese children in his neighborhood. It was always fun to hear the children talk in the strange language. Today, I don't remember the stories dad read, but I do remember the feelings I felt. I knew my father loved me because he talked to us nearly everyday, albeit by tape.

Near the end of Dad's year away, mom told us we were going to meet Dad in California. We would be staying with Aunt Jenna Vee and Uncle Jack until Dad arrived. The house was big, and it had a swimming pool! Mom loaded us all up and we made the few days journey from Texas to California. I was anxious to hear Dad's voice again but had no recollection of what he looked like.

The day before Dad was scheduled to arrive, all of us were lounging around the swimming pool. Cindy was diving off the diving board, and

Tom and I were holding onto the edge of the pool because our feet could not touch bottom. Tom and I were working our way back to the steps to get out of the pool when the gate in the fence opened. A tall man dressed in a uniform walked through the gate. My sister jumped off the diving board, ran squealing at the top of her lungs towards the man, and threw herself into his arms. Mom walked in behind the man, yelling at Cindy to get off him because she was getting him all wet. While hugging my sister and laughing at Mom, the man embraced Mom, then kissed her.

Puzzled by all the commotion, Tom and I looked at each other and silently wondered who our sister and mother were hugging. Soon, the tall, uniformed, and wet man disentangled himself and walked toward my brother and I who were still hanging on the side of the pool. He arrived at the pool's edge and smiled down upon us. He looked so tall. With the innocence of a four-year old, I looked up at the man and asked, "Are you my father?" He burst into tears, knelt down, pulled us both out of the pool and into his arms and said, "Yes, I am your father." The moment I heard his voice I recognized it as my dad's because it was the same voice I heard so frequently reading me stories on tape. This was the voice that asked us questions and listened so intently to our answers. He seemed not to care that we were getting his uniform even wetter. Tom and I both threw our arms around his neck as my father's embrace tightened around us.

This is the first time I recall seeing my father. The man with the loving voice.

*(Used by permission of The National Long Distance Relationship Building Institute, 2001. Information found at <http://www.fambooks.com/>)*

**Handout #1**