

ONCE UPON A WAR

The Diary of a Waiting Wife

JOAN DIEHL

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ASHLAND, OREGON

ONCE UPON A WAR

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For those who have endured wartime separation from loved ones, especially the families who once lived in a waiting wives community called Schilling Manor. There has never been another like it.

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PROLOGUE

Our daughter Alison was five years old when her father left for the Vietnam War. Not long ago, I told her that I had kept a diary during that traumatic period in American history. She urged me to convert the diary into a book, confident that my story would resonate with others who have experienced wartime separation from loved ones.

At first I dismissed her suggestion. My journalistic experience lay in writing and editing newspaper stories, not books. The shorter the story, the better it would hold a reader's attention. At least that has been my editorial philosophy. Nevertheless, Alison had planted the seed for *Once Upon a War*.

My thoughts kept returning to that diary. Out of sight and out of mind for more than four decades, what half-forgotten stories did its pages contain? Curiosity finally led me to our filing cabinet. At the far back of the top drawer lay three notebooks inside a folder labeled "Joan's Journals (Vietnam)." I pulled them out and opened the first one.

It was 1968, and I was living in a waiting wives community in Salina, Kansas. Thrust into the role of a single mother of five, almost every day brought a new challenge. Illness, frustration and exhaustion were the norm. Days, especially weekends, would not pass quickly enough, as the waiting seemed endless. However, community involvement and friendship with other waiting wives sustained me throughout the sixteen months I called Schilling Manor home.

Highlighting every weekday was the arrival of the most important person in Salina, our mailman. If he failed to deposit an airmail envelope in my box one day, he would deliver two or more the next. I was

fortunate that my husband, Glen, liked to write letters. By the end of his Vietnam tour, he had written 456 letters to me, I had sent 248 to him, and we had recorded twenty-two tapes apiece.

While working on this book, I was certain that some information I needed could be found in one of Glen's letters. When I approached him about my need, he knew exactly where to look. Without hesitation, he went to a closet shelf in our front bedroom and removed two large boxes filled with the letters we had written during the war. I had numbered them and made brief notations on the envelopes regarding their contents. Nevertheless, I was surprised at how quickly I found the information I wanted.

I had forgotten about the tapes we had made until Glen pulled them off the same shelf, along with a recorder. Much to our surprise, they are still intelligible. It is almost surreal to hear the voices of those little ones, who are now in their 40s and 50s.

The Assignment

A military wife doesn't choose where she lives—unless her spouse is assigned to an unaccompanied tour of duty.

His orders read “4th Air Commando Squadron, Project SEA” (South-east Asia). They were dated November 29, 1967. Suddenly I had a choice.

My husband, Glen, an Air Force captain, had been expecting an assignment to Vietnam. But as a commando? He shook his head in disbelief.

“These are the guys who paint their faces black and infiltrate enemy territory under the cover of night to create chaos,” he said. “I’m a lover, not a fighter.”

Almost six feet in stature, Glen’s jet-black hair and deep brown eyes accent his handsome face. Although I tell him that I married him for his looks, honesty and faithfulness were the real reasons. Should these attributes be tested in the future, I’m confident that he’ll pass with the highest mark possible.

Glen, an experienced navigator, took a closer look at his orders.

“I’m not going to be a commando after all,” he said. “They want me to navigate an AC-47 gunship.”

Armed with three 7.62-mm miniguns, the AC-47 can selectively fire 50 or 100 rounds per second. It’s affectionately called “Spooky,” “Puff

the Magic Dragon,” or simply “Puff” because it “breathes” fire on the Vietnamese communists.

On January 20, 1968, Glen was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering from Texas A&M University. He had successfully completed twenty-eight months of studies sponsored by the Air Force Institute of Technology. Soon he would attend a different kind of school, one that would teach him how to survive war.

We had been living in Bryan, not far from the Texas A&M campus in College Station. Bryan is a nice place to live but not without my husband. I didn't want to cope with five young children in a neighborhood where fathers come home at night. Nor did I look forward to being solely responsible for home maintenance. I could envision only frustration and loneliness.

I had heard about Schilling Manor, a waiting wives community in Salina, Kansas. The community officially came into being on January 1, 1966, when the Army assumed responsibility for the 735-unit housing area left vacant by the deactivation of Schilling Air Force Base.

Schilling Manor provides basic services, as well as various programs and activities for its residents, most of whom are families of men serving in Vietnam. Another plus is that the housing area is only 120 miles from Topeka, so my mother and Glen's parents will be able to see their grandchildren on a regular basis. It was an easy choice.

We've moved so often that none of our children share the same birthplace, although 10-year-old Robin and I were born in the same hospital in Topeka. Bruce, 7, was born in Great Falls, Montana; Alison, 5, in Bermuda; Warren, 3, in Mountain Home, Idaho; and 1-year-old Jennifer in Bryan, Texas.

I've decided to keep a diary throughout my stay in Schilling Manor. I feel that putting my thoughts and concerns on paper will help me survive the difficult period ahead.



Glen's Waiting Family. Joan holds Jennifer. The other children are (clockwise from left): Warren, Alison, Bruce and Robin. (October 6, 1968)

January 24

Growing up in Topeka, Glen and I had become accustomed to long, bleak winters. So we welcomed the 47-degree temperature that greeted our arrival in Schilling Manor early this Wednesday afternoon.

The children are staying with Glen's parents while we arrange for housing. Only two choices are available to us. The floors are in excellent condition in one place, but the rooms are dark, almost depressing. We're opting for the quarters located at 301 Concord Street. An abundance of light streaming through sliding glass doors creates a brighter, more cheerful atmosphere.

Our three-bedroom house in Texas was newer and much nicer. Only 1,800 square feet overall, its 300-square-foot family room offered ample room for the kids to spread their Lego blocks across the floor. Nevertheless, this four-bedroom duplex is in reasonably good condition, and the attached one-car garage is adequate for our 1963 Dodge Dart. My one disappointment is that the washer and dryer connections are located in the basement.

“Too bad there’s not an escalator,” I thought, picturing the countless loads of laundry I’ll be hauling up and down those steps. Our washer and dryer will soon become my “masters in the basement.”

After signing for our quarters, which proved to be a lengthy process, Glen’s next project was to find a hair salon for me. I had grown accustomed to regular visits to a hairdresser, but there was no time for that during this move. Although my hair was a mess, it didn’t bother me nearly as much as it did Glen. He was determined to solve the problem before the end of the afternoon.

While I was at the hair salon, Glen met Kars and Betty Aarhus, who are moving in tomorrow on the other side of the duplex. Our movers are due tomorrow as well.

Kars, whose heritage is Norwegian, and Betty, a native of New Jersey, have four boys ages 10 to 4 and a 2-year-old girl.

January 25

Today’s clear, sunny sky elicited much gratitude. We couldn’t have asked for better weather to move into our quarters, although we had to wait quite a while before beginning the process. Our household goods weren’t scheduled to arrive until afternoon.

In the meantime, I met Ann Palastra, who lives on the street behind us. Her husband, an Army helicopter pilot, leaves next week for his third tour in Vietnam. They also have five children.

Ann seems well prepared for their third yearlong separation while I'm wondering if I'll be able to cope with one.

I'm just thankful that Glen has a thirty-day leave before departing for survival school, to be followed by training in the AC-47.

January 26

Today I inquired about enrolling our three older children in school. Robin is a fifth-grader, Bruce a second-grader, and Alison is in kindergarten. Although it's the middle of a school year in a new location, I'm confident that they'll adjust to the change.

Some call them "military brats." However, I've never liked that term for children who must learn to adapt quickly to new surroundings. I believe that the military lifestyle helps them prepare for the many changes they will face as adults. Adjusting to those changes should be easier than if they had spent their childhood living in one place.

Schilling Elementary is a fairly long walk from the housing area, so highway patrolmen help the younger children on their way to and from school. I saw one patrolman tie a little boy's shoe.

This afternoon, Glen and I met with a sergeant for an hour-long orientation in the library of the Community Service Center. The sergeant told us that most of the residents are Army wives and that families with five children are the norm. He also said the post is operated by a limited supply of manpower and that most of the officers are doctors in the dispensary.

The sergeant explained that when Schilling Air Force Base was closed in 1965, the buildings were turned over to the town of Salina. The Army leases back the buildings as needed, but the housing area belongs to the federal government.

We spent Saturday getting as organized as possible for the children's arrival the next day.

On Sunday, we attended our first Mass in the chapel. The Catholic Church has experienced quite a few changes since the Second Vatican Council ended deliberations on December 8, 1965. For example, the nuns are wearing modern clothes, which is almost unreal after seeing them in traditional habits for so many years.

Another innovation is the dish for unconsecrated hosts at the chapel entrance. Those who intend to receive Communion take a host from another container and deposit it in this dish, which helps the priest know how many to consecrate during the Mass. I wonder how long this will last, as I can't think of an easier way to spread germs. Nevertheless, I'm not going to stop receiving Communion.

After Mass, we drove to Topeka for a visit with Glen's relatives and to pick up the kids.

January 31

Everything is unpacked and put away. How quickly our first week here has passed. If only we could ignore the latest news about the war, which is intensifying.

Allied forces have been caught off guard by surprise attacks throughout South Vietnam. They're calling it the Tet Offensive. Until now, both sides have observed a cease-fire during Tet, which is a traditional Vietnamese holiday that celebrates the start of the lunar New Year.

Waiting Wives

“Why is he giving me a present on Groundhog Day?” I wondered.

“It’s a little early, but it’s for Valentine’s Day,” Glen said.

I don’t know if my expression showed surprise or dismay. Probably both. Oh well, I may come to appreciate my new snow shovel someday.

February 3

Gerry Murphy, an Army wife who lives across the street, came over and apologized for not meeting us sooner. We told her that we were used to moving in and out of civilian neighborhoods practically unnoticed, so we didn’t expect any special welcome.

This month is beginning to fill up with meetings, most of them relating to Confraternity of Christian Doctrine education (CCD). Since I’ll be registering three children in the program, I felt it important to attend the first meeting. Two days later, a second one lasted two and one-half hours. At a third meeting, I agreed to help Judy Clark organize the CCD program.

I had no idea that complying with her request would lead to a lasting commitment throughout my residence in Schilling Manor.

February 8

This morning, The *Today Show* featured a filmed report on Rest and Recuperation (R&R) in Hawaii. One wife said she never watched, listened to, or read any news reports about the war after her husband left for Vietnam. This is the third time I've heard a wife say that. On the contrary, I don't feel that way. I want to hear and read as many news reports as possible, even those that make me angry. Of course, it's easy while Glen is still home. Yet, I don't think I'll feel differently when he's in the war zone. Staying informed is important to me.

February 13

One of the tires on Robin's bicycle needed repairing, so Glen walked the bike two miles to the subpost service station today. He didn't drive because he's trying to get in shape for survival school.

On the way, he passed a group of small children who were playing near Schilling Elementary. One girl saw him and called out, "Hi, Daddy." He acknowledged her with "Hi," after which she turned to the others. "Did you hear that? I called that man 'Daddy,' and he answered me." One of the other youngsters said, "My daddy's in Vietnam." Another chimed in, "My daddy's in Vietnam, too."

Glen didn't know why that little girl addressed him as "Daddy." However, since an adult male is a rare sight in Schilling Manor, she probably assumed that he must be one. Glen thought the other children's comments reflected pride in the fact that their daddies were serving in Vietnam.

Valentine's Day

This morning, Glen handed me a box of chocolates. Ap-

parently he thought the day called for something more romantic than a snow shovel.

February 15

Kars is on his way to Vietnam.

“I’m not going to watch any TV news about the war after he leaves,” Betty had said earlier.

February 20

How quickly the weather changes here. Yesterday, the temperature climbed to 68 degrees. By this afternoon, snow was blowing all around us. It was the first snow since our arrival and enough to cover the ground, causing much excitement in this household. Even the older children barely remember the last time they saw the white stuff.

February 21

This evening, I discovered a long love note in Bruce’s pants pocket. It was from a little girl in his class named Michele. Bruce told us that she tries to kiss him every chance she gets. I’ll have to ask his teacher about this. I should have that opportunity in three weeks, when it’s time for parent-teacher conferences. These conferences take the place of report cards for first- and second-graders.

“You don’t ever write love notes to boys, do you?” I asked Robin.

“Good gosh no, Mother! If I ever did, they’d come right up and punch me in the nose.”

February 22

This afternoon, at a Waiting Wives Club luncheon, I talked to a wife who hates to leave after living here for sixteen months.

She said she met her husband in Australia for R&R and took their three children with her. She made it sound so wonderful that maybe Glen and I can meet there instead of Hawaii, which is the usual R&R destination for men with families.

I also talked to a mother of four who's originally from Beloit, Kansas. She went through nurse's training in Wichita and thought she would like living there during her husband's Vietnam tour. However, life in a civilian community was too lonely and depressing. After a couple of months, she moved to Schilling Manor and is as happy as any wife could be under the circumstances.

I'm sure there were many other interesting conversations going on in that crowded room, but it was impossible to hear anything that was said more than a few inches away.

From what I've learned so far, a majority of the wives are very pleased with Schilling Manor.

Their comments have convinced me that I made the right decision in moving here. The general consensus is that time passes quickly, as most of the wives keep busy with their children and community activities. Some bag groceries at the commissary to earn extra money. I've also heard positive comments about the townspeople of Salina. Apparently most are supportive of Schilling Manor and its families.

Glen leaves tomorrow morning for Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington. He's looking a little glum, but I'm pretty upbeat. Knowing that all of my neighbors are facing similar circumstances is a huge consolation. I hope to get along with everyone here, especially my next-door neighbor.

Although Betty and I are very different in personality and background, we're becoming close friends. Opposites in physical appearance—I'm blonde and fairly tall, while she's short with dark hair—Betty is more innovative than I am. She knows how to fix things that leave me feeling totally inept.

The First Separation

February 23

After the older children left for school, Warren and Jennifer rode with us to the little airport, only a few minutes from our housing area.

Short goodbyes work best for us. Glen removed his baggage from the trunk, gave me a quick kiss, a “See you later,” and headed for the door of the small white terminal building.

While he’s in training, I expect my biggest challenge to be Warren, or Feller, as almost everyone calls him. Shortly after he was born, Robin bestowed that nickname on him. Only his Grandma Diehl calls him by his birth name.

Strong-willed and stubborn, Feller has grown so used to his daddy looking after him and dishing out the discipline that my job is definitely cut out for me. For example, no matter how hard I tried, I could not get him down for a nap this afternoon. He has refused to take a nap on other days, but this wouldn’t have been one of them had his daddy been home.

The other evening at the dinner table, I mentioned that we would probably eat nothing but the children’s favorite foods during their father’s absence.

This afternoon, Alison put me to the test.

“Has Daddy gone yet?”

I affirmed that he had, which prompted her next question.

“What are we having for dinner? Hamburgers or hot-dogs?”

Apparently she had forgotten that Friday is a meatless day in our family.

“Macaroni,” I replied.

Although mildly disappointed, she decided that Kraft’s boxed pasta would be an acceptable substitute.

I haven’t had time to miss him. So far, the kids don’t seem to miss their dad either. Nor are most of them old enough to worry about the fact that he will be going to Vietnam in the near future. Only Bruce has expressed concern. When he first learned of the assignment, his reaction was blunt.

“Oh, he’ll probably get killed.”

His tone was tinged with disgust bordering on anger.

“I don’t want to go to Vietnam when I grow up.”

I assured him that he wouldn’t have to go to Vietnam and that his dad would be okay.

Actually, I’ve not given any thought to the possibility that Glen might not survive this war. With his deployment still several months away, my focus has been on adjusting to our new home.

Early Saturday morning, Mother arrived on the bus to help with the children.

A little later another guest showed up, this one uninvited. The flakes descended quickly, as though sifted through a giant sieve in the sky. When our driveway disappeared under a thick white blanket, I knew that it was time to put Glen’s valentine to work.

“Husband left already?” It was the mailman.

“Wouldn’t you know? Yesterday.”

Betty came out to shovel her half of the driveway.

“Haven’t done this since about 1954,” she said, as she scooped up a shovelful like a pro.

I couldn’t remember the last time I shoveled snow, if ever.

Shortly after Betty and I finished our numbing chore, the sun burst through the clouds, as if to say, “I could have saved you all that trouble if you had been a little patient.”

Suddenly I miss him. When he’s home, he’s a big help with the kids, especially at bedtime.

Glen believes that fathers should help with the care of their children. A little remarkable coming from a man whose own father never bathed or diapered any of his children. I’m sure that’s due, at least in part, to a wife not wanting any help.

Mom Diehl is generous but strong willed and quite opinionated. Short, plump and bosomy, with coal-black hair, she presents a sharp contrast to her tall husband’s fair features and easygoing personality.

When we were stationed in Montana, we made a long trip that included a visit to Topeka, where we stayed with Glen’s folks. I was five months pregnant with Bruce at the time. One evening, Glen was bathing Robin, who was almost 3.

“It scares me to death how much help Glen gives you,” my mother-in-law said disapprovingly.

Although I was taken aback, that was probably a natural reaction from a woman who took sole charge of caring for Glen, his older sisters Vera and Lola, and younger brother, Clyde, throughout their childhood.

Glen’s parents had little formal education. His dad completed the sixth grade, while his mother made it through the eighth. However, their actual classroom instruction was limited. In those days, children were needed at home to work on farms. Nevertheless, they’ve learned a variety of practical skills over the years, many of them self-taught.

The Media

The North Vietnamese and Vietcong have opened up offensives in areas that were considered reasonably secure, and President Johnson seems unable to cope with the escalation of hostilities.

In addition, the media are expressing more pessimism about the war than at any previous time. The February 25th edition of the *Salina Journal* contains a reprint of an editorial that appeared February 23rd in the *Wall Street Journal*. According to the editorial, we should prepare for a bitter defeat:

We think the American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven't already, the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed; it may be falling apart beneath our feet. The actual military situation may be making academic the philosophical arguments for the intervention in the first place.

Granted, there is an opposite theory, the "last gasp" notion that the weeks'-long wave of assaults on cities and hamlets is the enemy's final outburst before decreasing the war's intensity and coming to the bargaining table. Perhaps it will turn

out that way, but right now the evidence does not lend the theory much support.

Hanoi is believed to have relatively large numbers of troops still uncommitted in North Vietnam. The Communists appear to be getting ample supplies of weapons from the Soviet Union and Red China. As long as the arms keep coming and there are Vietnamese Communists to use them, you would suppose they could keep up the struggle more or less indefinitely. Thus far, at least, they are showing with a vengeance their ability to sow destruction and demoralization everywhere.

On February 26th, the *Salina Journal* published a long editorial expressing even more pessimism. The writer's observations began with an ominous prediction: "It is crystal clear that unless the Vietnam War is stopped it will develop into a war between the United States and Russia—a world conflagration."

The editorialist condemned the escalation of the conflict:

Mr. Johnson believes he is honor-bound to step up the war. But there is no course more honorable than to admit a mistake. The moral strength to confess error is the hallmark of the honorable man or the honorable nation. It is the greatest, the most crucial test of character.

Is, then, our Vietnam effort a mistake? If the war continues, both North and South Vietnam will be destroyed and there will be nothing to save. The government we have established in the South does not govern, cannot protect its people, and lacks their support. It is not a democratic institution.

Our only honorable and wise course is to de-escalate the war and to prepare to withdraw from Vietnam in the best order and with the fewest casualties possible.

If President Johnson finds his personal pride too stubborn, the weight of defeat too grievous, then the Congress should re-assert its constitutional authority, if necessary remove him from office, and put this nation back on the paths of peace. This is the way to true strength in our democracy.

It would be an honorable as well as a practical course for the United States we cherish and that is now endangered by the mistakes of prideful men in power.

It could save the world as we know it from extinction.

So how should the families of loved ones fighting in this unpopular war react to these gloomy words? Ignoring them may be best.

I don't know how this war will be resolved, but somehow I feel sheltered here in Schilling Manor—sort of like living in a cocoon. So far, there have been no anti-war demonstrations in Salina, and none of the wives have been subjected to harassment. Nor have I heard of anyone's husband being killed.

Survival Training: His and Mine

February 26

While Glen is in training, I'm learning what it's like to be a single parent. As I struggle to cope with the responsibilities of my new role, there's little time for socializing. For example, a college friend and sorority sister called today. Jo, who lives in town, invited me to a coffee tomorrow morning at her house. However, I had to decline her invitation because that's the time I've scheduled for commissary shopping. I also wouldn't feel right asking a neighbor to babysit for a social event.

February 29

Glen's first letter arrived today. He apologized for not calling as soon as he arrived at Fairchild Air Force Base.

"I am so sorry I failed to call you Friday night. I have no excuse except it just seemed I was going on another flight and it hadn't sunk in yet that I was leaving my loved ones for a long time. If you promise to always be as beautiful as you are, I will promise to never again be so thoughtless."

Most of his letter was devoted to details about the families of three men he had met. Noting that this information probably wouldn't interest me, he offered the following explanation.

"I want you to share in my life as much as possible."

My reply devoted ample space to Feller's recent behavior.

"I had a couple of bad days with him wandering off a lot, each time in a different direction.

"Yesterday and today, he has stayed around here while outside, thank goodness.

"Sometimes I think he wants to be back in the house in Texas, as he talks about this every now and then. When he gets upset about anything, he says, 'I can't like this house, I can't like hotels.'"

Betty just learned that Kars has been put in charge of recreational equipment and entertainment at Cam Ranh Bay.

"I need him here more than they do there," she sighed.

March 1

This afternoon, the temperature climbed into at least the upper 60s. I'm beginning to dread summer. I can envision hundreds of kids swarming all over the housing area, with harassed mothers outnumbered at least 5 to 1. What a picture!

Sometimes I wonder how any of us are going to survive a year or more without husbands to help with our never-ending responsibilities.

I don't want to think about it, but what if we lost their help forever? Please, God, keep my husband safe, as well as those of other waiting wives, whether in Schilling Manor or elsewhere.

March 2

I have no idea what was wrong with Feller last night, but I had to get up four times with him. Today he threw a fit when

I was leaving for a hair appointment. I don't know if he thought I wasn't coming back or if he was just being difficult. I'm sure it didn't have anything to do with Glen's folks, who drove here this morning and plan to return home tomorrow afternoon.

March 4

Glen writes that survival training is unlike anything he has ever experienced.

“Here in the judo class I am learning different ways to kill Charlie—with a knife, a bayonet, a rope, or even with my bare hands. Of course, I am also learning to defend against these various weapons. I forgot to mention a club or a sharpened stick. I can see where it might be necessary that I might have to kill someday, but I hope I never have to.”

I, too, hope he never finds himself in that position. Although terrible things happen in a war zone, I don't worry about him. I have faith that God will keep him safe and that our lives will eventually return to normal.

Here at home, a huge toy crane that belongs up the street has attracted Feller's attention. He has been so fascinated by the bright yellow toy that he lugged it into our back yard on Saturday. Although I made him return the crane, I saw him playing with it again this morning in the people's yard.

Thinking that the toy's owner might not like this situation, I thought it best to apologize for Feller's behavior. When I rang the doorbell, a man answered. Although I didn't see any children around, I was surprised when he said Feller could play with the crane anytime he wished.

The next morning, I heard pounding on the outside of the house. They were putting up our nameplate.

Betty came over later to tell me about a report she heard on

the early morning news. Cam Ranh Bay, which was considered relatively safe, had come under Vietcong fire. She said her head started to ache almost immediately. I don't know if she's following through on her resolution not to watch any TV news about the war. However, as long as she turns on her radio, she can't escape it.

That afternoon, Alison drew a picture of the inside of a house, after which she added a family. I wondered why she failed to include a father.

"The daddy died," she said.

"That's too bad," I empathized. "What happened?"

"Oh, he went to the war and died," she said matter-of-factly.

March 8

The temperature climbed to 73 degrees this afternoon, tying an all-time record high for the date. I couldn't enjoy it, though.

Feller disappeared shortly after lunch, and I walked up and down the streets in our area searching for him. At two-thirty, I was beginning to feel sick inside. By three o'clock, all sorts of fears were going through my mind.

I finally called the sheriff. A patrolman came by and drove off looking for Feller.

It was after four o'clock, and I was outside talking to Betty and another neighbor when Ann Palastra came by. She said she had seen Feller a short time earlier. I walked back toward her house, and there he was, nonchalantly heading for home. He had been gone over three hours, and I was drained emotionally.

"Where have you been?"

He pointed to the house across from Ann. Apparently he was inside when I searched for him on that street.

"Don't ever go inside someone's house without telling me," I said weakly. "I need to know where you're playing."

The patrolman finally returned. I don't know if he knocked on any doors, which is what I should have done. However, with so many houses in our area, it would have been a daunting task. I was just grateful that my wanderer was safely home.

Despite Mother's help, Saturday was as worrisome as Friday.

I was leaving for a hair appointment when I saw some boys throwing hard chunks of dirt near the house. It looked like a dangerous game, so I hurried my kids inside. Too late. Robin was crying. Gerry's son Mike had struck her on the left temple with one of the clods, barely missing her eye. She suffered a painful gash and swelling, and the entire area around her eye soon turned black and blue.

In the meantime, Feller ran off again. After rounding him up, I finally took both boys to get haircuts.

Fortunately, Robin felt better on Sunday, and we could see some improvement around her eye. As far as I know, Gerry is unaware of the incident.

Sunday afternoon, Mother and I took the kids out to dinner. In the restaurant, Feller noticed a man with his wife and four children and kept saying, "There's a daddy like my daddy." He also informed our waitress, "My daddy went to the Air Force."

The kids were pretty excited when Glen called this evening from England Air Force Base in Louisiana. Having completed his survival course, he's undergoing training in the AC-47.

Now Feller wants to talk to me on the phone.

"Well, for you to do that, one of us will have to go someplace else that has a telephone," I explained.

Feller continues to be a challenge, especially when it comes to naps. If he misses two or three in a row, he's fit to be tied.

“Oh, what I wouldn’t give to be able to talk to him l-o-n-g distance,” I wrote Glen.

I have been so tempted to put him on the bus with his Grandma Pauley. The bus has always been Mother’s choice of transportation, even for the long trips to visit my sister and her family in California. Mother enjoys talking to other travelers and readily accepts their opinions as undeniable facts. Yet she’s skeptical about any advice or opinion that comes from her daughters or their husbands.

“Yeah, she’ll listen to that guy on the bus, but she won’t listen to us,” my brother-in-law Glen will say half jokingly.

[So far, the only time Mother hasn’t traveled by bus is when she flew to Bermuda during the 1962 Cuban crisis. With the birth of our third child imminent, Glen was on alert, involved in searching for Russian ships carrying missiles to Cuba. Released long enough for Alison’s birth, he had to fly to North Africa a few days later for more alert duty. Mother stayed to help out during his absence, which lasted until after Christmas.]

March 13

Today, I had my long-awaited conference with Bruce’s teacher, Miss Ford. She said he caused quite a stir among the girls when he arrived in the class, noting that she had a difficult time gaining control of the situation.

“They decided he was just about the cutest thing they’d ever seen,” she said, “and they were after him right away.”

I mentioned the long love letter that Bruce had brought home. Miss Ford said she didn’t think he ever wrote any notes. In conclusion, she confided that she hadn’t experienced anything like this before and hopes that she never does again.

March 16

Although I don't have time to be lonely, I'm ready for my husband to come home. It seems I never stop during the day, and evenings are shot putting the kids to bed. Guess I'll have to resign myself to a constant state of tiredness until Glen returns.

He's ready to come home, too, as evidenced in one of his recent letters.

"I shouldn't really write today, as I am feeling pretty low. I found out today that I am almost sure to ferry an AC-47 to Vietnam. I should have a week or two between the time I finish here and the time I have to leave, but that is a far cry from the month I expected. Trouble is, right now I can't be certain of anything. It's probably silly, but I'm coming home even if it's only for one day.

"I sure am homesick for you and the children. Every time I see a man and his wife out with their children I feel like crying. I want to walk up to them and tell them how lucky they are.

"Tell Dad he can stop worrying about a fishing trip because I don't think I will be going."