

Friday, 29 Aug 1997

LVES and ME PART IV

Good Afternoon Doris,

Paul has suggested I do a little explaining of things - stuff I actually should have started these series of letters to minimize the kind of confusion you mentioned. So, I reckon 'part IV' will be some bio. on myself which can help with your keeping things in context. I'll get to the Beecher/WebTV part when I next have the necessary web time. Paul's currently unemployed and his need to use Internet access takes precedence over my time here.

O.K. On to some personal data about myself:

I was born April 1, 1945, in Kansas City, MO. I spent a few of my toddler years there then my family moved to Maryville, MO. It was in Maryville that I spent my formative years. I graduated from MHS, which is what we called it but the legit name was Washington High School.

Maryville was, and still is, a fairly rural town which included a college campus. The college at that time was called Northwest Missouri State Teacher's College. I'm not sure what it's called now, but it's a part of the Missouri State College system. My Mom received her Bachelor's degree at this college and started teaching in the local public school system.

I remember thinking it 'neat', as we would say then, that my Mom was a teacher. But that didn't last long - she taught at the High School! This meant I couldn't get away with anything...I had to trod the straight and narrow. My senior year was particularly painful: The locker assigned for my use was THE VERY FIRST LOCKER TO THE LEFT OF HER CLASSROOM DOOR! She told me she had nothing to do with the locker assignment, but to this day I don't believe that. I went to great pains to avoid my locker when I knew Mom would be standing at her door (teachers like to do that sort of thing during breaks between classes). On too many occasions I would be at my locker, changing books, or whatever, when all of a sudden, I would hear "Hi, baby. How are you going?". "Mom, I asked you not to call me baby, you're embarrassing me." Sometimes Mom would say "Sorry, son.", but not often enough. She usually said the same thing every time which was "Jimmy, you're my baby, you'll always be my baby so get used to it, buster".

My Mom died this past February. Oh to hear her say "Hi, baby!" just one more time.

My Dad was in law enforcement. Initially, upon moving to Maryville, my parents bought a cafe from my Uncle - they called it "Tucker's Cafe" and was very typical of what you would find in a farming community that happened to have a teacher's college - a lot of coffee drinkers, for sure. While operating the cafe, my Dad, who had been with the Military Police (he was in the Army during the war) was hired by the local

police department to be their 'motorcycle cop'...I say it like this because they only had one motorcycle and the police force size was in the neighborhood of four, maybe five officers.

My Dad later ran for the Office of County Sheriff and filled that office for six years. He had one official deputy and a whole lot of others he called his posse. Almost all the farmers had horses and they were delighted to be deputized and put on shows at the annual rodeo.

My folks owned and operated the cafe the entire time I was growing up, so you can well imagine that my family had a pretty full life, what with running the cafe, Mom going to college then tormenting me at school and Dad being THE Sheriff...well, there were no Tuckers in Maryville who were not known to everyone. I longed to travel and meet some people who didn't know me and wouldn't 'tattle' to my Mom or Dad about every little thing. After graduating, I joined the U. S. Navy. My Uncle Bill (Mom's brother) was in the Navy during WWII and his 'sea-stories' got to me ... I could do nothing other than join the Navy. My Dad took my side in this matter, because Mom wanted me to go to college. I had been offered a (small) scholarship grant from a public speaking contest at which I was a participant. Had to write my own speech, of course, and I think I probably did a good job and would have done O.K. in college...but...the reasons I stated above sent

me off to San Diego in May of 1963 where I officially became a 'sailor'.

I left behind, in Maryville, my older sister, Leslie, my younger brother, Richard (about a year younger than me) and Willie who was 10 years old at that time and my Kitten. Kitten was just six years old, so she and I didn't get to go through the sibling-bonding years as I did with the others. I missed Willie's teen years, as well. Now that they both have e-mail, I'm able to communicate so frequently with them that I hope I can make up some of those missed sibling-bonding years which means 'all that fighting' that brothers and sisters do as they're growing up. By 'fighting' I mean everything from "He won't stop touching me!" to "It's not MY turn to do the dishes"....so on and so forth.

My life as a sailor began at the Navy's boot camp at the Naval Training Center, San Diego, CA. (NTC is no longer in existence...just something else that reminds me I'm getting older and older and...). My first couple of years in the military found me in the Republic of Panama at a Navy radio station called FarFan. From there I returned to San Diego for a bit more training (I was a Radioman - the job of maintaining the military communications requirements for wherever I might be stationed). In Panama I was a ship to shore/shore to ship CW (Morse code) operator. For 24 months the only thing I did was sit in front of a R-390 radio receiver, with

a typewriter on the desk, headphones on my ears and a telegraph key sending and receiving 'dits' and 'dahs' to and receiving them back from ships at sea (U.S. Navy ships received priority, but we served any ship which needed message service.

Next I was onboard the USS Coral Sea, an aircraft carrier. We were later involved in what had become known as the "Ton Kin Gulf incident". I still used CW but now just ship to shore. We were a bit more advanced on this ship and even had teletype and facsimile communications. CW was the primary method of communications up until about the late 50's; the state of the art in communications has made CW all but obsolete; used mostly by ham operators anymore.

Next tour of duty was back in San Diego where I was an instructor at the Radioman school. I was well skilled at Morse code and typing so these were the primary courses they wanted me to teach. I also taught a class in basic electronics. It was during this tour of duty in San Diego when I met the woman I was to marry. She and I have three children: Johnny, the eldest and currently a 2nd Lt. in the USAF stationed at San Antonio, TX. (and Father of my oldest granddaughter, Christina Marie, age 11), Jimmy (named after my Father who died the month before he was born) who is currently a student at San Jose State College, CA, studying to become an O.T. (Occupational Therapist), and my daughter Jancine, the youngest, who is the mother of two of my grandchildren, Joey (8 y/o)

and Summer Sky (the most beautiful 3 y/o girl in the entire world - just ask her Granpa). I am now divorced from my children's mother.

My Navy career went on to include tours of duty onboard the USS LA SALLE in the Persian Gulf, the USS CHICAGO in the Mediterranean and the USS BLUE RIDGE, in the Pacific. When I was onboard the USS CORAL SEA I traveled throughout the Pacific, the South China Sea, The Sea of Japan and the Indian Ocean. I've crossed the equator which means I'm a "shellback" - a term which can only be applied to someone who has traversed from one hemisphere to the other.

Somewhere during all these different tours of duty, I found myself 'in-country" Viet Nam. I was stationed at LSB Binh Thuy, a logistic support base for the river boats patrolling the MeKong River and Delta in southern Viet Nam. I traveled around the delta working as a courier for the Commodore, Naval Delta Forces.

It was after this tour of duty that my marriage fell apart and she and I went our separate ways.

I received an Honorable discharge in April of 1976. It was one month later, almost to the day that I was ambushed with the shotgun blast to my head.

Well, Doris, you know there's one heck of a lot of stuff I could have written you about my years prior to 1976, but for the purpose of your low-

vision article I should think this should do it as far as giving you a good context for what I've been writing about after that fateful year.

Please, if you have any questions about anything I write, or want some elaboration about something, just let me know.

I reckon now I can continue with LIVES and Me, but part V will have to wait another day or so. Labor Day Weekend is a 'family kinda thing' and I'll be busy for awhile. I hope you and your husband have a wonderful holiday weekend, and that a cool breeze finds its way onto your veranda.

Jim