

'I Cannot Rejoice'

By VALERIE M. KUSHNER

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1962—We were such newlyweds we counted Christmas day as our four-month anniversary. My husband had just begun Medical School. We didn't buy a tree (saving money) until at ten that night. We made much of trimming, then admitted that we missed our big family celebrations. The sleet turned to snow. By early morning we were on our way to our parents' house.

1963—So wonderful. Our daughter born on Christmas Day. A month earlier, Jack Kennedy had died. Feeling my child stir within me that November afternoon, I feared for her.

1964—A glory brought to us by our child. From now on birthday cake be-

came the dessert for our Christmas dinner.

1965—Our daughter at 2 still played with the boxes more than the toys. I became a full-time wife and mother. In a few months my husband would finish school, and enter his profession.

1966—We swam on Christmas Day. My husband was doing an internship at Tripler Army Hospital in Honolulu. My husband made his rounds that morning at the hospital—so many volunteered for duty in Vietnam.

1967—Explain to a child on her fourth what missing in action means. She reminds me: "Daddy said he won't be home when I get four, but he prom-

ised to be back when I get five." I was carrying our second child.

1968—The waiting. Gratitude for sure knowledge that he was alive, constant fear for his survival. Our son at nine months could not walk. I said to the children, "Maybe next year we will be together again."

1969—An airplane flying to Paris, 96 children and 45 wives and mothers sent by Ross Perot to plead for our men. The North Vietnamese told us to tell our children that their fathers were criminals.

1970—Beginnings of disillusionment. Public concern ineffective. Congress apathetic. The Sontag raid brought me to a low point. Some troops were being withdrawn, but my

husband was not home. His agony was being used to prolong the war.

1971—I have been married for ten Christmases. This is the fifth year of separation. The words choke me. Our Christmas child does not make any predictions for her ninth birthday. Withdrawn. Winding down. Vietnamization. Meaningless phrases. Must have an end to this war. I see no end.

I cannot rejoice in the birth of the son of God. My son has no father.

This Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of a son to Mary. This Christmas Day some other mother's son will die in Vietnam. That death takes away all that was taught by Christ's birth.

Valerie M. Kushner is the wife of an American "missing in action."