

# A Changed

By Donald P. Baker

Washington Post Staff Writer

For nearly seven years now, Kay and Glen Perkins have had no more than three to six letters a year, each no more than seven lines long, to tell each other about lives that have vastly changed.

When Air Force Capt. Glendon W. Perkins waved goodbye to his family at McCoy (Fla.) Air Force Base in January of 1966, Edward was 11, Paul, 10, Cindy, 8, and Stephen, 6.

Now the four are all teenagers, mod children of the '70, complete with long hair on the boys, a fact that is "a major concern" of their father, who has been a prisoner of war in North Vietnam since July 21, 1966.

"Apparently he has seen a picture which we sent in a package," Kay Perkins said. "He's quite concerned about the children's appearance."

Edward is now 18, a college freshman who stands six-foot-two and has a mustache.

"Even seeing a picture won't prepare him for seeing them in the flesh," said Mrs. Perkins, who has changed quite a bit herself.

Kay Perkins was 28 and blonde when her husband last saw her. Now she is 35 and graying and 15 to 20 pounds lighter.

"Glen and I were both young when we eloped: He was 19 and I was 16. I dropped out of high school to get married," a decision which she doesn't regret but hopes Cindy won't repeat.

## Junior College Student

In the 75 months since Perkins' reconnaissance plane was shot down by a surface-to-air missile over Hanoi, Mrs. Perkins has "really blossomed as an individual," according to one friend.

She finished high school at night, and now studies at a junior college.

"I've changed, all right," she said. "I'm a much better person, I hope."

Their house in Orlando was finished the day before Perkins left, and Mrs. Perkins has redecorated it three times despite her husband's advice that she "leave the furniture in the garage until I get back."

"In one note," she said, "I told him I had graduated, and I know he received it, because he wrote back that 'it's too bad they didn't teach you how to spell diploma.'"

She has been home room mother, Cub Scout den mother, "more of a mother," she said, "but you can't be a father."

Mrs. Perkins and the children have "learned to compromise" in the years without a man in the house.

The boys' hair, for instance. "We have an agreement. It's not as long as they would like it, and not as short as I would have it," the mother said.

"I'm not sure dad cares for the compromise," Mrs. Perkins said. In a recent letter, however, he said "I guess the boys' hair looks all right now."

Mrs. Perkins said any complaint about hair length is offset by the fact that "both Ed and Paul are making straight A's in school."

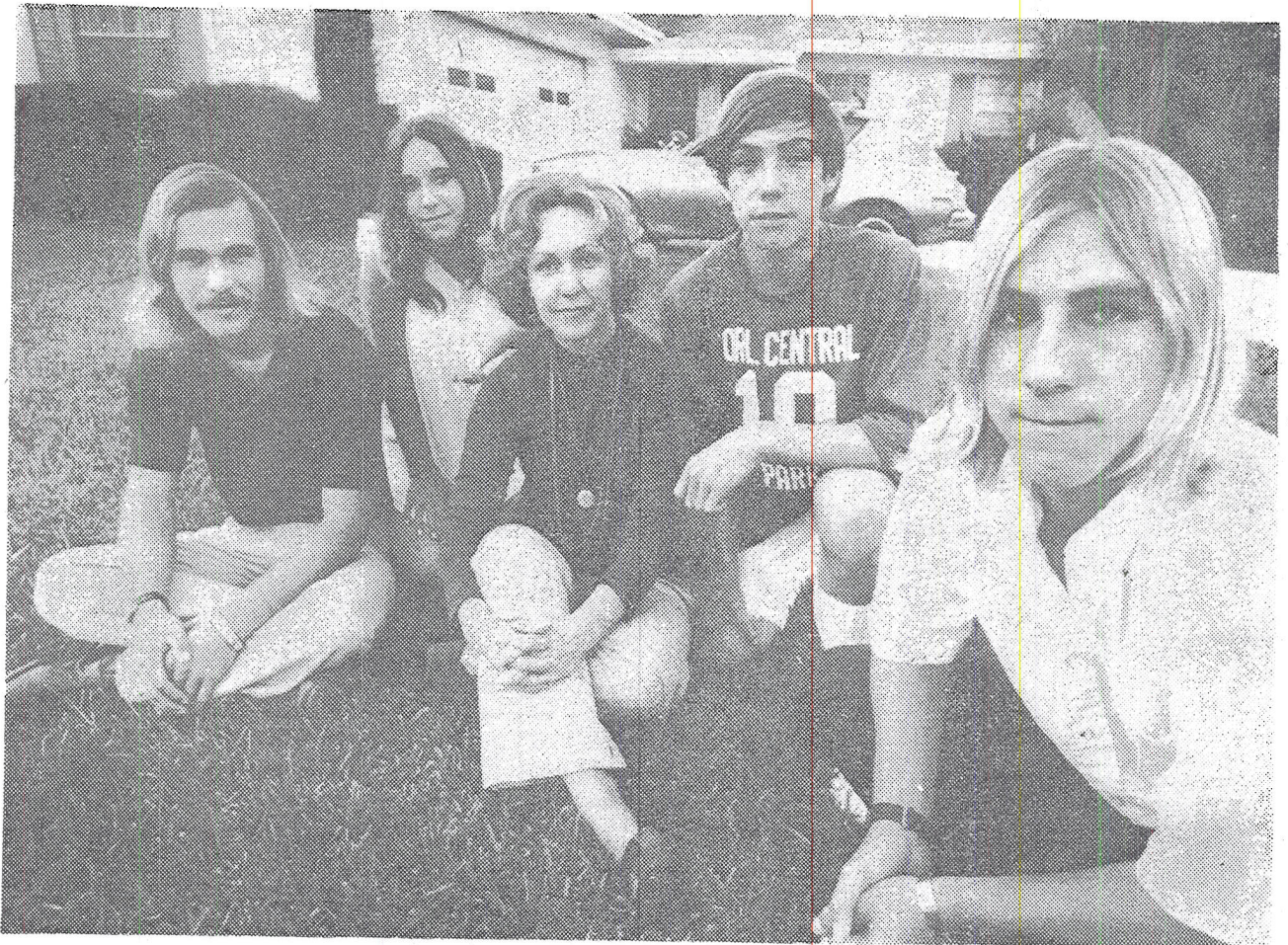
## Interested in Sports

The modest hair length of the youngest boy, Steve, will please his father. "He's the redneck in the family," she joked, "all wrapped up in football and other sports."

Hair length isn't the only social change since the mid '60s.

"The last movie we saw together was 'My Fair Lady,'" Mrs. Perkins remembers,

# Family Awaits Concerned



United Press International

The Perkins family plans for Maj. Glen Perkins' return (from left): Ed, Cindy, Mrs. Perkins, Steve and Paul.

"and the one before that was 'Tom Jones.' It was really risqué. And now!"

Pamphlets prepared by the Defense Department and the Air Force as part of Operation Egress, the plan to aid repatriation of returning POWs and their families, have helped the Perkins get ready for the big event.

As with other families, they'll get advance word on

when the POWs will return to the states, and they'll be waiting at the hospital at Keesler Air Force Base, Gulfport, Miss.

The hospital is more than 500 miles from their home in Orlando, however, and Mrs. Perkins hopes to convince the military to permit the men to be sent closer to their homes. Egress Recap calls for paying travel expenses to the hospital one time only. That means either

pulling the children out of school, or having them see their dad for only a few days.

#### Reduction in Pay

Perkins' return will mean a considerable reduction in pay. His family now gets the full pay of a major (he was promoted while a POW), plus flight pay, plus hazardous duty pay, plus relief from paying federal tax on

his income after the first \$500.

The family is now "in a period of gathering strength, trying to save a little money" to be prepared for the reunion, says Mrs. Perkins.

"The older boys are concerned that they've grown so much, not just in height and weight, but socially, in their intellectual life.

"We talk, work it out. We want everyone relating."

Mrs. Perkins is aware that

# POW Father

families in their situation tend to idealize their missing members.

"So I've been trying to concentrate on his bad traits. But I can't do it, I can't remember. He's gotten to be the greatest guy," she said.

"For Glen, it'll be like a diver coming up from the depths. He'll have to go slowly; be desensitized."

Aware of warnings that reunions can be letdowns, that marriages sometimes fall apart under the strain, Mrs. Perkins said, "That's something I can cope with."

"Many marriages don't last 10 years. We made it 13 years before he left. Now I feel we can beat the new odds."

"I know what life is like without him. I can't conceive of that continuing," she said.

Her husband's future plans may depend upon finances, Mrs. Perkins said. A new Florida law permits dependents of POWs to attend state colleges free, including tuition, books, room and board.

## "May Very Well Retire"

"If that holds true after his return, then we'll have no financial need. And he may very well retire," she said. Maj. Perkins will have 20 years' service next summer.

Perkins, who is a navigator, "always has dreamed of being a pilot," his wife said, although he now is too old to become one in the military. He could retire and take commercial flying lessons, or follow a career in the electronics he has learned in the service, or even return to the family garden center business.

"But it's awfully hard second-guessing," she said. In a talk with POW wives at Jacksonville Naval Hospital,

returned POW Markhart Gartley told them "many of the men are most anxious to get back to work," Mrs. Perkins recalled.

For six months after Perkins' plane was shot down his family didn't know if he was dead or alive.

"Then two housewives who were members of a peace group went to Hanoi in early 1967, to assess bomb damage, and visited with 21 men, all of whom had been listed as missing. Glen was one of them. The women brought letters back and that was the first I knew that he was alive."

Since then, the Perkinses have traded letters—he writing the seven lines permitted by his captors, she just six.

The family also has seen several pictures of him—in Life magazine in 1967, and on television at Christmas in 1968, 1969 and 1970.

"In those films of Christmas services, Glen is the one playing an old pump organ. That's his hobby, playing the organ," Mrs. Perkins said.

In addition to comments about hair length, Maj. Perkins has written other things which indicated he had been receiving letters.

"Every marriage, I suppose, has some little phrase of joke which is meaningful only to the husband and wife," Mrs. Perkins said. "In ours, it came from a very boring speech Glen made one time before a class of fellow officers. He said that people should find time to read, and suggested reading in those odd moments scattered throughout the day."

"About two years ago I mentioned doing something in those odd moments' and eight months later we got a letter in which he said, 'In those odd moments, scattered throughout the day, I am thinking of you.'"