

Will POW Still Be 'King' of His Family?

Orlando, Fla.

WHEN AIR Force Major Glendon Perkins comes home after seven years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, he'll find his once-submissive wife now challenges his most fundamental beliefs.

A stern father, Perkins made all the family decisions, did not approve of his wife reading books and certainly would have forbidden his sons to grow the shoulder-length hair they now sport.

"Be good to Kay," he told his wife's mother when he flew off to the war after 12 years of marriage. "She's never been on her own. She doesn't know how to take care of herself."

After his plane was shot down over North Vietnam in 1966, he wrote home from a prisoner of war camp, "I still feel, although I'm 10,000 miles away, that I'm king and master of my family."

Mrs. Perkins' early letters to her husband were full of requests like "could I buy blue jeans for the boys at Sears?" and "could I have a new ship?"

"You see," explained Mrs. Perkins, who married when she was 16 and her husband was 19, "some women are their father's daughter. When they marry, their husband continues to be their father. It was so in our marriage.

"I lived a sheltered life. I was naive and never questioned anything. I never fin-

ished high school and I did not know much."

At first Mrs. Perkins, now 35, said she tried to base all of her decisions on what her husband would do. But she said eventually those decisions seemed as out of date as the crew cuts that her sons, Ed, now 18, and Paul, 17, wore when their father went to war.

Little by little, she struck out on her own. Daughter Cindy, 15, was allowed to date and Steven, 13, was sent to a reading clinic.

She traded in the family's old car and then purchased a new car for Ed and Paul — a decision she is sure her husband would not have made.

Then, the new Kay Perkins enrolled in night school,

earned a high school diploma and entered a nearby community college where she is majoring in psychology.

Mrs. Perkins became active in local POW classes and started organizing rallies and making speeches to local service clubs.

To date she has made 140 speeches. She said even the thought of public speaking used to make her physically sick.

"I am a new person," Mrs. Perkins said, who has also lost four dress sizes in seven years. "I know if Glen had stayed home my only interest would have been cleaning house and taking care of the children. That would have been my whole life.

"But I had to change. Circumstances forced me to change. I've learned a lot in school and from reading. I've learned that there are not just good guys and bad guys.

"I used to be so easy for me to hate the North Vietnamese. But I've learned they are people just like us. I've grown up as a person."

What will Major Perkins think of her new self-image?

"I don't know how pleased my husband will be with my new personality," she said. "I don't know what the difficulties in camp have done to him. I'm counting on the fact that his difficulties have helped him grow.

"Just the trauma of the changes in society are going

to be tough. Two nights before he left we saw 'My Fair Lady.' If he saw 'Fritz the Cat,' a recently released X-rated cartoon, he would flip out. He doesn't even know what flip out means.

"After hopping and praying for all these years that we would be able to get along without him, he's going to find out that we have. We are going to have to learn to need him again.

"I know we will never go back to being the couple we were. I've done the things and become the person I had to. But I'm still very much in love with my husband. I've never met anyone else I wanted to be married to."

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After seven years of living without a male head of the family, the Glendon Perkinases no longer lead a "sheltered life"; from left are Mrs. Perkins, Cindy, Ed, Steven, Paul