

POW's Family



JULIE BUTLER WITH SHEILA, 5, AND PETER, 6
Neither of the children has ever known their father

Bay Wife Keeps Her Joy in Check

By Jim Brewer

Six-year-old Peter Butler banged open the front door of his San Rafael home, a stack of papers under his arm and a sweeping smile across his face.

"Look, Mommy!" he shouted. "Our whole class drew pictures of Daddy coming home!"

Julie Butler carefully held back tears as she and her son sifted through the two dozen drawings provided by Peter's Glenwood School classmates.

The woman was particularly attracted to one displaying an American flag flying above a rather dis-

torted version of the Butler home. The accompanying hand-written message was identical to the others:

"Dear Mrs. Butler, Today we thanked God for peace. We hope Peter's father will be home soon."

For three days, Mrs. Butler has known that her husband, Air Force Captain William Butler, will soon be released from the North Vietnamese prison that has held him captive since November of 1967.

JOY

But her sense of joy and relief remains guarded even today because the last five years have taught her that "out of self-defense, you have to remain pessimistic."

"I won't get excited until I know he's back in the United States," she said.

Mrs. Butler was vacationing in the Virgin Islands the night President Nixon announced that a peace settlement had been reached. She refused either to watch television or read the newspapers.

"You come to a point where you just can't stand another rumor," she confessed. "Last October, I was sure he was coming home. Then, just before Christmas, I realized he wasn't.

"That's when I realized I had to get away and stop thinking about it," she continued. "I had finally reached the point where I

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ceived ideas about what it will be like when he finally gets here," Mrs. Butler said. "Five years of his life have passed him by. Change will be apparent with his every human contact. I'll just have to take my cues from him."

Mrs. Butler confessed she has become so independent that, in a sense, "He's going to have to find room in the family."

VIEW

"I don't think it's going to be rough, but I have compensated for his absence. I'm glad to give those duties up, but they're going to be hard to shut off."

As for the children, "They don't know what to expect," she said. "They have a sort of contagious excitement, but they really don't know."

In the years of her husband's absence, Mrs. Butler has become a strong voice



WILLIAM BUTLER
A captive since 1967

was saying: "When it's signed, sealed and delivered, call me. But until then, I don't want to hear anything."

Neither of the Butler children has known their father; Peter was eight months old when the Air Force pilot left for Vietnam. Sheila, now 5, was not yet born.

The family's ranch-style home has never been home to Captain Butler. Mrs. Butler purchased it just two years ago.

"I don't have any precon-

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in the organization of wives of American prisoners of war. For that reason, she admitted, the excitement of her husband's release is tempered with extreme sorrow.

FAMILIES

"I know too many of these families well," she said. "I know what they're going through, and I know a great many of those men will never be heard from."

In the family garage are stacks of bumper stickers reading, "POWs Never Have a Nice Day."

They are part of the material amassed during the long campaign by POW wives to call attention to the plight of their husbands held captive in Indochina.

"I don't know what we'll do with all that stuff," Mrs. Butler said. "I just hope there will be no need for anybody else to profit from our experience."