

## Visit With A POW

By Marcy Bachmann

■ It had been ten years since Richard and Denny graduated together from the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, and fourteen years since that hectic, bewildering plebe year when they first met and traded youthful ambitions in their spartan shared room.

Richard was a tall, athletic, precocious product of the Long Island, N.Y., school system, brash and outspoken, exuding 17-year old confidence in his ability to buck the military system.

Slightly-built and soft-spoken, Denny was a clear contrast, a North Carolina boy of gentle, quiet strength who talked of marrying his high school sweetheart, and did.

Opposites brought together by an arbitrary room assignment, they remained friends for four years. Upon graduation in 1963, the caption beside Richard's picture described him as "part of the Academy's intellectual fringe." It was predicted that Denny, who believed in the axiom "a strong body should house a healthy mind," was headed for "a full, rewarding and successful life and career" in the fleet.

Six years later, including a year served in Vietnam, Richard resigned his officer's commission in favor of a civilian career.

Denny's immediate future was decided in 1967 when his A-4 attack bomber roared off the deck of the aircraft carrier "Intrepid" on a one-way flight to North Vietnam. He was shot down, captured and placed in Son Tay prison camp amidst the jungles, dikes and rice paddies surrounding Hanoi.

Almost six years had elapsed since Denny's capture. Five weeks had passed since his release when Richard and I stood nervously in the hallway outside his hotel room.

As if caught by a stop-action camera, Denny stood in the lighted doorway looking remarkably like the grinning midshipman staring from the slick pages of his 1963 yearbook. He was still trim and fit, auburn hair clipped

close to his head. His flared slacks, fitted chocolate brown blazer and wide tie were more current than conservative.

"Hi, Denny. How are you?" Richard ventured tentatively.

"Fine, just fine. Come on in."

"It's been a long time."

Much had been written and said about possible difficulties in bridging a chasm created by years of isolation and imprisonment. We knew no more of what he had experienced than he knew of us. Confronting the uncertainties proved at least a little unnerving.

We sat in the hotel room, four of us including Denny's blonde wife, and three empty champagne bottles they vaguely remembered helping to drain the night before, exchanging idle, awkward chatter. "How do you like San Francisco? Ridden the cable cars yet? How long will you be staying?" Inconsequential trivia being tossed like dry twigs on the conversational fire until the flame was warm enough for bigger logs to burn.

The past few years of our lives had differed so drastically from the last few years of his, we groped unsurely for some common ground. What could we say to a man whose most recent history must have seemed like a surrealist nightmare? "Hey fella, who do you pick to win the pennant?" or "Did you hear about Stan Smiley? He never made it back."

The mind rifled through a dozen questions begging to be asked, but were strangled by tightening bands of conscience. We didn't know where to begin. How to ask him to start without offending, without embarrassing, without making him uncomfortable.

If Denny was affected by similar uncertainty, he showed no sign of struggle. Placidly facing us, his hands rested comfortably in his lap. I experienced a fleeting uneasiness. Perhaps he was tranquilized? I promptly put the thought out of my mind. Richard had said Denny was always quiet, the kind who faded easily into his surroundings. ("I bet the North Vietnamese didn't even know he was there until it came time to send him home," Richard had remarked with brittle humor only a friend could understand.)

"How about going downstairs for a drink," Denny said suddenly. "I've been drinking tomato juice all day."

In the rose-carpeted elevator the silence was chipped and broken. The names of fallen classmates were exchanged, each man adding a name or two to the other's list.

"Think you'll make it to the ten year reunion next fall?" Richard asked.

"I don't know. I haven't had a chance to think about it."

"Should be a helluva time."

In the crowded cocktail lounge dozens of people were hunched around tables barely big enough for two. We chose a cluster of black leather chairs against the left wall and ordered drinks from the mini-skirted waitress. "I remember when a girl could get arrested for

*"Confronting the uncertainties proved at least a little unnerving."*

dressing like that in public," Denny grinned as he turned to watch her long bare legs pick their way through the crowd to the bar.

In the dim late afternoon light his appearance remained completely relaxed, his hands once again folded calmly in his lap, his face boyishly unlined except for a few spider thin marks around his pale eyes. It was as if he'd slipped around the corner for a pack of cigarettes and returned a half a dozen years later to wonder what the fuss had been about in his absence.

"Hey, that was some parade they gave us this morning," he smiled. "Really great. You know, I was kind of surprised there weren't any anti-war signs. No peaceniks or long-hairs."

"Well, there was one guy who ran up to us and shouted, 'It's your own fault for getting caught!'" Denny's wife reminded him.

Denny had never been to San Francisco before. All he knew about the city was what his North Vietnamese captors had told him. And what they had told him was that San Francisco was a major center for the anti-war movement.

"They would show us these films of the anti-war rallies here. Hundreds of thousands of people. I guess I thought we'd see some of them today."

Denny said he believed the war was prolonged by such activities. His voice was subdued, but his words were harsh. "They (the North Vietnamese) would really be elated during those - what did you call them? - moratoriums. And especially when some politician would speak out and say Congress was going to withhold funds for the war. That would encourage them to hang on a little longer."

We nodded as he spoke of the delight his captors expressed at anti-war activities. And we didn't mention at all that had it been possible to scan each of those thousands of faces that overflowed the grassy fields on those moratorium days, Denny would have seen Richard's and he would have seen mine, and the faces of many of our friends.

This wasn't the time to try to explain to Denny how much we had cared that he was a prisoner of the North Vietnamese as much as we were prisoners of our consciences. After all, at the time of Denny's capture how many people even thought about the miniature Asian nation called Vietnam?

It was simply not possible to tell a man who had endured so much that we had raised our hands to the filming helicopters circling like buzzards above because we needed to do something and what else could we do?

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*“Misa and Akira decide where to ease a waistline and where to take one in.”*



Boutique to be fitted. They besiege Misa and Akira with questions: “Should I leave the tie a little looser?” “What color shoes should I wear with this? — I have gold ones but they have pointed toes.” “Oh, this is snug. I’m going to have to go without breakfast the day of the show.”

Misa and Akira decide where to ease a waistline and where to take one in. In two hours the fitting is finished.



Finally, “Fashion Fantastique” day arrives. Four hundred tickets have been sold, and by 11 a.m., the luncheon tables are ready. A few minutes later eight girl scouts wearing kimonos are selling raffle and door-prize tickets to guests. At 12:30 people are being seated, and Mistress of Ceremonies Bette Root is welcoming them.

The Suwa drumming group is scheduled to open the program. The group is not ready when Bette announces them, but she improvises with a 10-minute prize drawing.

The drummers are electrifying, with stylized movements that make them seem like dancers. Japanese classical dancers follow.

Then Akira’s fashions are shown, with Donna Goldfein, who does public relations for American Airlines, as commentator. Lovely women pirouette as they display the fashions, but the crowd’s ovation is for the model jogging off the runway — 106-year-old Larry Lewis, formerly at the St. Francis hotel and now Goodwill Ambassador for Western Girl, Inc.

Although some of the guests leave early, finding the event too long, most stay until 3:30.



Most of those in attendance agree the event has been a success. At their own after-the-event critique, the committee members are somewhat less enthusiastic. “The entertainment was too long.” “Akira had asked for neat hairdos; some of the models insisted on wearing their hair down around their shoulders.” “The dressing rooms were impossible.” “Who kept fooling around with the light?” Bette Root asks for specific reports. The financial report, indicates that the event was a success for the club. Almost \$2000 will be added to the General Fund.

Then suggestions are made on how the next event can be improved. “We need a Stage Manager.” “We must start earlier and pre-sell raffle tickets.” “Let’s get better door prizes, worth at least \$100 each.” And so the last meeting ends. □

## Chiquita® presents 2 other ways to eat a banana.



You can eat Chiquita Brand bananas sliced as part of fresh fruit salad. Like the one in the above picture. We call it Fresh Fruit Rhapsody. Or you can eat Chiquita Brand bananas as part of a fruit and vegetable toss, also shown above. Both are perfect for Summer. And as you can see from the recipes, both are easy to make.

### Mixed Fruit And Vegetable Toss

Romaine lettuce, large fresh white mushrooms  
Curly endive, leaf lettuce  
Package frozen artichoke hearts, defrosted, blanched and chilled  
Sweet Bermuda onion, sliced very thin. Cherry tomatoes  
Chiquita Bananas, cut crosswise into 1-inch chunks  
Wash, drain and chill greens. Use enough of each variety to loosely fill two quarts in measure when torn into generous bite-size pieces. Place in a large wooden salad bowl. Wash and slice mushrooms and add with all remaining ingredients, tossing with a piquant French or Italian dressing of your choice. Serve as a dinner salad with main course. Have the pepper mill on the ready. This will make 4 to 6 generous servings.

### Fresh Fruit Rhapsody Both Salad and Dessert

Chiquita Banana slices  
Chilled honeydew, watermelon and cantaloupe balls  
Strawberries, washed and hulled  
Blueberries, rinsed and drained  
Nectarines, unpeeled and sliced  
Boston lettuce, freshly washed and refrigerator crisp  
Fill a lettuce-lined bowl with an assortment of melon balls or cubes, banana chunks and other fruits and berries in season. Serve with a honey french dressing, fluffy cream mayonnaise, or scoops of frosty sherbet.



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## Aftermath *continued*

He might have understood, but we kept what was perhaps a cowardly silence because we were afraid that he would not.

Back in the reality of the cocktail lounge, in that emotionless monotone, Denny was droning pleasantly on about horrors — the torture and killing of dogs to be used for food. "They believe the adrenalin and juices that fear and vain produce, make the meat taste better," he said matter of factly. "You can always tell when they're going to kill a dog because they tie up its legs and . . ."

"Please," I pleaded in embarrassment, "don't go on . . ."

A well publicized POW walked by. "I guess he had a hard time of it," Denny mused, watching the strapping man make his way across the room. "They (again the North Vietnamese) are funny in some ways. The harder you resist them, the harder time they give you. He must have been particularly hard to crack."

He talked of Christmas bombing raids over Hanoi. "We weren't in any danger. The Vietnamese moved us up near the Chinese border. They told us our government was trying to kill us so we couldn't go home and tell everyone how well we'd been treated," he said dryly.

Bits and pieces of prison life tumbled in with talk of the future, his desire to attend post graduate school, the emergence of high prices, hot pants and pornographic movies, and his more immediate concern not to miss a pre-dinner cocktail party.

The usual tourist tips were exchanged. Where to get a good meal. Richard rolled his eyes heavenward as I absent-mindedly recommended a favorite Chinese restaurant.

"Don't worry about it," Denny laughed easily. "I still like Chinese food. I'll even eat rice . . . now and then."

The ice tinkled in our empty glasses. All that could be said had been said.

"Great seeing you again," we all agreed politely.

**H**e looks the same, exactly the same," Richard marveled as we stepped outside. "It's an eerie feeling you know," he half-whispered into the chill evening wind. "After all these years, after all he's been through, to see him sitting there like that. It just gave me an eerie feeling." □