

## **THIRTY-SIX YEARS LATER**

### **ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI**

*21 August, 2006*

During an early Monday afternoon in her St. Louis suburban home, Carolyn Jordon, sat at her desk doing some work on the computer. Back in 1970, she was Carolyn Walden, married to Jake Walden—they had two children. After Jake was shot down, his status changed several times over the years, starting as missing-in-action, then to POW status, and later back to missing-and-presumed dead. In 1980, Carolyn remarried, had two more children with her new husband, and for the past twenty-six years had adjusted and accepted what she believed to be her first husband's fate—that he had died in Vietnam.

A knock on the front door got Carolyn's attention. She stood up and when answering it, she was a little surprised and startled to see her former brother-in-law Jerry Walden standing in front of her.

"Hi, Carolyn," he said, a gentle smile on his lips.

"Jerry, what a surprise."

"I'm sorry, Carolyn. I should have called, but I thought it would be better if I saw you."

She invited Jerry inside, and they walked to the kitchen while briefly catching up with each other's life, since they hadn't seen each other for over fifteen years, once when Carolyn remarried in 1980. They met again in 1990 when the DoD issued a death certificate for Jacob and notified Carolyn and Jerry that Jake's death had been confirmed, changing his status from MIA to KIA.

After the end of the Vietnam War and after the return of the American POWs in 1973, there had been no word on Jake other than he was not returned and was reclassified as missing. Although Carolyn adjusted with time and reluctantly accepted that he was dead, seeing his brother was disturbing because they looked like twins, even though Jerry was a year older than Jake. Every time she saw Jerry, his presence bothered her and contributed in part to the families growing apart.

"So, Jerry, what brings you here?"

"I think I'd better show you. Can we use your computer?"

"Of course."

They went to the computer and Jerry typed in a video news link. It took a minute for the link to load.

"So what is this?" Carolyn asked.

"Just tell me what you see."

A video from a news website finally opened up. "Well, that's you," Carolyn said as she watched the video of a man carrying a boy out of a school.

"No, it's not," Jerry said.

He then showed her a picture in a magazine and again she said, "It looks like you, Jerry."

"No. It looks like Jake," a choked-up Jerry whispered.

Upset, Carolyn yelled at Jerry for the suggestion and got up from the table. "You know Jake is dead! He's dead, been dead over thirty years."

"I know, Carolyn, I know, but you have to admit, you thought that was me."

"Why are you doing this, Jerry? We've all moved on."

Jerry was also upset, but after a little more arguing with Carolyn, he convinced her to return to the computer. She sat back down, and Jerry zoomed in on the face in the photo of the man carrying the boy and then pointed to the small scar over the left eye at the edge of the eyebrow.

"Jake had a scar there that I gave him when we were learning how to box."

Seeing the eerie resemblance and the scar, she started to tear up. "I don't understand. How can this be?"

Jerry and Carol tried to understand and make sense of how Jake could still be alive. They had doubts while Jake was in a missing status, but when it was confirmed he was dead, the doubts were gone—until now.

After a few more minutes of studying the video and photo, they were convinced that the man they were looking at was Jake, a conclusion that brought up questions for them. Jerry ranted about conspiracies while Carolyn tried to comprehend the situation.

“Why didn’t he come home? Did he turn?”

“Jake would never turn, not in this lifetime...I don’t have any answers, Carolyn.”

They both wanted to know what happened to Jake, why he didn’t come home, and where he had been for over thirty years. They decided that they needed to find someone who could answer their questions...