
Wild Blue Yonder

🍏 BY LISA M. BOLT SIMONS 🍏

Dear Mrs. Beverage,

It was September 1976. My mother, brother, and I had just moved to Colorado from Las Vegas, Nevada, almost four years after my dad was killed in a plane crash. On a Monday a few weeks after the school year began, I started second grade at Rockrimmon Elementary. That's when I met you.

Rockrimmon had so many students that fall of 1976 that portable trailers had been erected on campus to handle the overflow. I walked into one of these trailers as a new student, but I remember that day as if I were still there. Even now, I imagine watching a scared little girl entering class for the first time, holding her mother's hand. The door was open wide, and sunlight silhouetted the pair as they stepped into the room. The girl looked around at her new classmates' faces as she stood just behind her mother. She did not want her mom to leave her sight. Tears clouded her eyes when they said good-bye.

I was indeed that little girl, and you, Mrs. Beverage, approached me, bade goodbye to my mother, and guided me to my new desk. You looked a bit like Mrs. Brady from *The Brady Bunch*—your straight blond hair followed the curve of your head and curled up at the edges just above your shoulders. You were so friendly and made such an impression that I still

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remember you even as my own children start second grade almost thirty years later.

You introduced me to my new classmates, and then I had to stand in front of the students, tell them my name, and talk about my family and where we came from. I told my new classmates about my dad, who had attended and graduated from the Air Force Academy. I told how he became a USAF Thunderbird pilot, and that he died four years before. Despite my soft voice and shy demeanor, I remember that I was proud of my dad and his accomplishments. I told them of the dedication of a new building at Nellis Air Force Base named after him—Bolt Building—and the ceremony that would be held that coming December.

That day in September 1976, my first day of second grade in your class, I spoke about my dad and shared him with others for the first time. It seems the trauma of starting a new school planted the memory of my dad's death deeper than the years between age three and a half and seven. But things are the same in one respect: What my memory told me as a second grader—my father died and I knew him really only through photographs—is what my memory tells me today. But perhaps my second-grader mind held more recollection of a father lost just four years before, rather than the thirty-plus years after the fact.

Later that day, I was approached by a classmate named Mindy. She had thick, haylike hair and wore Coke-bottle glasses. She looked at me and said, "So what do they do at Bolt Building, make nuts and bolts out of your dad?"

You Made Me a Better Person

I rattled to you, Mrs. Beverage, crying as I spoke.

I remember holding your hand as I stood by your side, tears falling without reserve as you told Mindy to apologize. It's a memory like a living memorial, one I remember much more clearly than the man of whom it speaks.

I will never forget you, Mrs. Beverage, and I want to thank you for helping a scared little girl bear the brunt of such a mean comment, and of such loss. In my mind I can still see you reprimanding Mindy and sending her back to her seat, and then you looking down at me, smiling, caring, encouraging, allowing me to cling to your side.

MOST SINCERELY,

Lisa M. Bolt Simons

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Lisa M. Bolt Simons is a writer and a teacher. She is working on her biggest project to date, her memoir entitled The Missing Man: A Daughter's Search for a Lost Thunderbird Pilot.