

Welcome Home

My uncle comes home from the war today. Uncle Marty is Daddy's brother and he's been fighting the war against that bad man, Saddam Hussein. He's been gone for a long time, and now we're all going to pick him up at the airport. There's a lot of us. Grampa, Gramma, Mom and Daddy and all Daddy's brothers and sisters and my cousins. Plus a lot of older people I don't know. There's so many of us that we have to ride in a bus, as if we were going to school. But its summer and we're not going to school, we're going to see my Uncle Marty when he gets home from the war.

I've dressed special for the occasion. I'm wearing my Operation Desert Storm t-shirt Mom bought for me, and my American Flag headband. I wanted to show Uncle Marty that I "support our troops" though I'm not totally sure what that means (I think it means I like the soldiers, and I do because my uncle is one of them).

At Valentine's Day we made Valentine cards in class to send to Uncle Marty. I got the address from my Mom and gave it to my teacher so we could mail them to him. I couldn't wait to ask him if he got my card. Another girl in my class also had an uncle that was in the war. She brought his address in too so some of the class could make cards for him. I was afraid more kids would make cards for her uncle than mine because she's "popular" but my teacher promised me it would be even. I wanted Uncle Marty to get lots of cards so he would know I missed him and hoped he would come home safe.

We all got into the bus and drove to the airport. It was a long bus ride. Really long. A lot longer than my bus ride to school, which was actually short. Sometimes, on really nice days the summer we would walk or ride bikes to my school and play on the playground. This summer I'm hoping my mom might let my friends and I ride our bikes there all by

ourselves, as long as we wear helmets. We're older than we were last summer, so I think she'll let us. That way she won't have to push my little brother in the stroller. He's only three, so he's too little to walk all that way, and he doesn't know how to ride a bike yet.

It takes forever, but finally we're at the airport. Everyone is hoping Uncle Marty's plane hasn't gotten here yet. We want to surprise him. He knows somebody is coming to get him, but he doesn't know EVERYBODY is coming. Grampa tells us we're early, so we'll have to wait for him. We find the place where he'll come into the airport and start waiting. It's a good thing someone is babysitting my little brother back home. I don't think he would like all this waiting. He gets bored really easily.

It's getting late and I'm getting tired, but I need to stay awake for the surprise when Uncle Marty comes. I wish I had brought a book with me. My favorites right now are the Babysitter's Club Little Sister books. They're about a girl named Karen who is the same age as me. She has an older step-sister named Kristy who babysits a lot. When I get older I want to start a babysitters club. I think that would be fun. Since I don't have a book I start goofing off to keep myself awake. I get a little silly when I'm really sleepy. Mom tells me to behave. I think she's getting tired too.

That's when I hear my grampa say his plane is here. I start to get excited. I haven't seen my uncle in a long time. I wonder if he'll look different? Will being in the war change him? Will I even remember what he looks like? Everyone gathers around near the door. Some people have brought signs. Everyone is wearing flag pins with little yellow ribbons on them, I think somebody made them for us. I can't see because I'm still short, so my dad picks me up and puts me on his shoulder. Everyone has gotten really quiet, so you can't tell there's a bunch of people waiting just inside the door. I can see the plane through the

window, not that far away, and there are people walking towards us. I try to pick Uncle Marty out, but all I see are people I don't know. They look at all our signs as they walk through the door. I think they're jealous they don't have a big Welcome Home party waiting for them.

Finally I spot a tall, thin guy in a light blue shirt. He looks a lot like how I remember him, only thinner. His arm is in a cast and sling. "Daddy he got hurt!" I say, surprised. Daddy explains that Uncle Marty wasn't hurt fighting in the war. He got hurt playing a volleyball game in Germany, where he and the other soldiers had gone after the war while they were waiting to come home. Daddy kind of laughs as he is telling me the story. I don't understand what is so funny about it, but Daddy said I would probably understand the irony when I was older. I don't know what irony is either, but I decide to take his word for it and focus my attention on my uncle, who is about to come inside the airport.

Uncle Marty sees Grampa first, since he is standing out in front and the rest of us are kind of grouped around the corner. He gives Grampa a big hug with his one free arm. Then as he comes further into the building he starts seeing more people, and our signs. Our plan must have worked because he is completely surprised and he looks happy. He greets everyone, shaking hands and hugging people. I start fidgeting again, excited for him to see me. Daddy puts me back on the ground, saying I'm moving too much. Finally Uncle Marty gets to where we're standing and hugs my mom and dad, then he leans down and picks me up using his good arm (Uncle Marty is strong). I wrap my arms around his neck and give him a big hug.

"Welcome Home."