

THE FINAL SALUTE

by Tab Berg

My dad and I shared an abiding faith - and a questioning nature. Asking questions is not a sign of doubting faith in God or Country - it is how we seek to explore and understand it.

My father has been with me at every defining point in my life.

He was there the first time I graduated from college and finally figured out who I was. He was there the second time when I figured out what I could do. He was there when I proposed and later when I married the love of my life - and found my soul mate. He was there when I started my business and found a purpose.

He was there in my best moment, when two little magical beings came into my life - Melissa & Tori. And, he was there in my worst, when the Doctors said they would not make it.

I remember Dad said, "be strong." And so I was strong. I didn't waiver or cry. And Melissa thrived. After two months, Melissa came home, a tiny bundle of drooling, giggling joy.

Then little Tori began to really struggle, each day a battle just to stay alive. Her tiny body was battered and swollen, covered with bruises, tubes and needles. Every bell or buzz sent my heart racing. The Chaplain came to me often to prepare me for the loss. But nothing could prepare me. So I begged God. Then I demanded. I said if he required a life, to take mine for Tori's. I started to break.

Then Dad said to me: "have faith." So I prayed again, asking only for God to hold Tori in his hands. And he answered, "she has always been in my hands."

Tori came home two months later. Dad was with me then, too.

I will miss my father more than I can say. I am saddened that he won't be here to joke with, laugh with, to share impertinent questions - or to remind me to be strong. But I am praying that God will hold Dad in his hands, and help me to be strong.

