



The Search for Canasta 404: Love, Loss, and the POW/MIA Movement

Melissa Robinson, Maureen Dunn

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The whirlwind romance of Joe and Maureen Dunn began in the spring of 1963. Each the youngest child of a working-class Irish Boston family, they quickly fell in love and were married soon after they met. Joe subsequently enlisted in the Navy, attended flight school, and volunteered for Vietnam. On Valentine's Day 1968 - eleven days after his first tour of duty was extended - Joe was ferrying an unarmed plane, call sign "Canasta 404," when he drifted into Chinese airspace and was shot down. That tragedy helped to ignite one of the most important social movements of recent decades. Eyewitness accounts suggested Joe might have survived the initial attack, but Maureen, determined to prove her husband was still alive, met with resistance rather than answers from a stonewalling U.S. government. In response, she organized the "Where is Lt. Joe Dunn?" committee, one of the first POW/MIA activist organizations in the country. Maureen's efforts attracted the attention of others in similar circumstances and she was one of the cofounders of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. Later, she served as a national coordinator and chairman of the board, and was northeast regional coordinator for over twenty-five years. Today, the POW/MIA movement has changed the political and social landscape, and Maureen is the League's Massachusetts coordinator. She continues her work as an activist and organizer, as post-Vietnam conflicts and acts of terrorism have continued to swell the ranks of Americans with lost loved ones. Part love story, part inside account of the growth of a movement, "The Search for Canasta 404" is a deeply personal narrative of private tragedy and public activism.

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