

## You Had to Be There...

### J. Charles Plumb

[President Francis presented U.S. Congressman Robert J. Lagomarsino, 19th District, to introduce Captain J. Charles Plumb.]



**Congressman Lagomarsino:** It's a pleasure and a privilege to welcome you to Ventura County, and to Ventura—my home town—and to the annual meeting of the California Avocado Society.

Let me tell you a little story. I hope not too many of you have heard this. It illustrates the way I like to look at my role in talking, when I'm asked to do so. It seems one day there was a beautiful—and you'll find out why—wise princess walking in her garden one day, and she heard a voice cry out, "Help me! Help me!" And she looked around, and didn't see anybody or anything, and so she started to walk on; and the voice cried out again, saying the same thing, so she looked a little more carefully and she saw a little frog about so big sitting by the side of the pool, and she bent over and said, "Were you talking to me?" And the frog said, "Yes, I was. I used to be a congressman, and a wicked witch turned me into a frog; but if you will kiss me, I will turn back into a congressman." So she leaned over, and picked him up, and put him in her purse. And he really started screaming and hollering and said, "Aren't you going to turn me back into a congressman by kissing me?" And she said, "No. Tell you what. Talking congressmen are a dime a dozen, but talking frogs are something else." So I'll be short.

I want to especially welcome the guests who have come here from elsewhere: from Mexico and Australia and Israel. You see, I'm very delighted that you have taken the opportunity to see for yourselves some of the finest avocado producing areas in the world, right here in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. And we, on the other hand, look forward—and I'm sure you have heard too, to learning of your experience and successes; and I hope this will be a fruitful exchange—no pun intended. The avocado industry has a great future, and no one knows that better than you folks gathered here today. The future, after all, is ours to determine, so I'm particularly honored to introduce to you our keynote speaker for today: a man whose perspective embraces both the past and the future.

Captain Charles Plumb is a former Vietnam prisoner of war, a Naval Academy graduate, product of what is now the top-gun navy flight school, a veteran of 75 combat missions over Vietnam. And I just found out, just before lunch, that he was a flight student of my good friend Senator John McCain. In any event, in 1967, he was shot down south of Hanoi, and spent six years in a prisoner of war camp, where he distinguished himself among his fellow prisoners for his leadership, good humor, and Christian faith. In 1973, he was repatriated and began a series of public appearances, which includes thousands of speeches plus appearances on the Today Show and CBS Morning News. Captain Plumb is the author of two books: "I'm No Hero" and "The Last Domino." He is a recipient of the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, and the Prisoner of War Medal—which I was privileged to have played a role in authorizing in the U.S. Congress. Captain Plumb now lives with his wife, Cathy, and two children in Santa Barbara, and I understand he's a prospective member of this Society; and so without further ado, and especially in my role as chairman of the POW/MIA task force in Congress, I'm pleased to introduce to you a man whose story can provide inspiration to us all, Captain Charlie Plumb ....

***Captain Plumb:*** Several months ago, I got a call from Lois Todd—I didn't know if that was her real name, or a stage name—and she said, "We heard you're quite a patriot." And I said, "Well, I love my country." She said, "And that you're really red, white, and blue." I said, "Yes." "And you believe in freedom of press." I said, "Yes." She said, "And free speech." I said, "Yes." She said, "Good! I want you to come give one!"

I said, "Well, I do this for a living, and have you heard about my honorarium?"

She said, "Let's not talk dollars here." She said, "I can offer you something far more valuable than anything you could put a price on."

"So? What's that?"

She said, "Having lunch with the most wonderful people in the world" ... long pause ... "and," she said, "I think I can get Hank Brokaw to give you a few avocado plants."

And I said, "Are they root rot resistant?"

And I have found that it is true. We just had lunch—Cathy and I have just had lunch—with some of the most wonderful people in the world, and we are pleased to be with you. And just the likes of Hank and Gil and Jack and our congressman here, it's fun for us, as well.

But the most valuable asset I think that I can bring to this table, if you will, is to try in the next few moments to ask you to go on a journey with me—to ask you to try to feel the feels, to smell the smells, and experience the experience of a prison cell—a cell that's eight feet long and eight feet wide, wherein your total facilities turn out to be a board bed and a two-gallon bucket. Where they pass through the hole under the door two

bowls of rice a day and a little crock of water. And they're going to do this for 2,103 days. Now, that equates to age 24 to age 30, if you can imagine and remember the years of your life: 1967 to 1973, just short of six years. And you say, "That's an interesting premise there, Charlie, but I don't think I'd sign up for that." And in fact, I can't even imagine that happening to me. You see, if my purpose here is to try—as the congressman said—to inspire, to try to demonstrate how the human spirit in fact can overcome great odds, and if this has some application to avocado growing or family raising or good neighborliness, then I think you can go on the journey with me.

So let's assume that we're going to take this journey together.

Let's assume that we are high-flying jet fighter pilots, OK? That we've been trained in the finest schools in the world—and I flew out of Miramar, California. In fact, we used to terrorize the Henry ranches. See, it really wasn't important, our perfect landings or our bombing scores; it was how many pickers we could knock off their ladders. Remember that, Gil?

They promised the best to the best. But that's where we start the journey, OK? We are the best of the best. Man! We got a good crop. We got good prices. We're goin' to boogie!

I was a graduate of the Naval Academy. I married my high school sweetheart out of Kansas. We went through flight training together. And I left on the aircraft carrier Kittyhawk—a floating city, bigger than the Doubletree, 5,000 men aboard the 'Hawk. And I promised my bride I'd be home in eight months, and I almost made it. I was five days from the end of my tour in Vietnam. Five days, and the end of my combat experience and my return to the States and my loved ones back here.

Let me tell you about that day. The day I was shot down. Maybe you've had a day like this ....

It was puffy clouds and blue sky, and look at this—look at this. I'm 24 years old; I'm in charge of a multi-million dollar flying machine. Look at this. See this hand right here? I have two throttles in my left hand. If I push these things all the way to the stops, I can go twice the speed of sound. Fourteen hundred miles an hour! Look at this. See this pinky and this thumb? I have enough fire power hanging from the stations under the wing of this airplane, I can destroy about any city in the world. And I'm 24 years old. And probably bullet proof. Ever feel bullet proof? Look at the statistics: Seventy-four times I've taken off over the enemy; I've come back; I've landed safely. Seventy-four times I've flown off that ship; they've shot at me a lot, never knocked me down. Bullet proof.

I found out about five minutes later that you and I on this journey, this high-flying journey, this "king of the sky" journey ... we weren't so bullet proof. We were hit by a surface-to-air missile, you and I. It exploded some 12,000 pounds of jet fuel we had on board that airplane. You ejected. I ejected. Our parachutes opened, and you and I came floating down over enemy territory.

As we had been trained to do as fighter pilots, I looked up at that canopy. I counted the panels in my parachute. That's called, "assessing your support group."

Cathy and I sat down in a restaurant a couple of years ago in Kansas City, where we lived. (We just moved to California twenty months ago). We were in the restaurant, in fact, with some of our good friends who were big shots in Farmland Industries, the biggest co-op in the country at that time, back in Kansas City. We were in a restaurant there, seated rather quietly and elegantly; and about two tables over a guy kept looking at me and I looked, just didn't recognize him. He came over to our table. The guy pointed his finger in my face, and said, "You're Plumb." And I said, "Yes, sir, I'm Plumb." He said, "You're the guy that flew jet fighters in Vietnam. You're a fighter pilot." I said, "That's right." He said, "You were shot down over enemy territory. You parachuted to the ground, and you spent six years as a prisoner of war." Somewhat dumbfounded, I looked at this guy and I said, "How in the world did you know all that?" He chuckled and he smiled and he said, "Because I packed your parachute."

Now, you ask ... this guy that runs all around the country making speeches? Suddenly I was speechless. The best I could do was stagger to my feet, reach out a very grateful hand of thanks. This guy came up with just the proper words. He grabbed my hand, he pumped my arm, and he said, "I guess it worked." I said, "Indeed it did, friend. I must tell you I've said a lot of prayers of thanks for your nimble fingers, but I didn't realize I'd have the opportunity of expressing my gratitude in person." He said, "Were all of the panels there?" "I've got to be honest with you. Of the 18 panels I was supposed to have in that parachute, I well recall looking up: only 15 good ones. Three of the panels were torn—but it wasn't your fault, it was mine: I jumped out of that jet at 600 miles an hour and close to the ground. That's what tore the panels in the parachute; it wasn't the way you packed it."

I said, "Let me ask *you* a question. Do you keep track of all the parachutes you pack? Do you know of all the lives you've saved?" The guy said, "No." Now, this is the most important part of the conversation, maybe the most important thing I say this afternoon. I think it deals directly with this Society and what we're gathered here to do. Here's what he said. He said, "No, I don't keep track of all the parachutes I pack. It's enough gratification for me to know that I've helped somebody out along life's rocky road."

But I guess that's the whole purpose of this meeting. Why do we get together? Oh yeah, we have lots of technical things to talk about. And we've got a great industry, and we need to meet and get together and collect on some vital issues that impact each one of us for sure. But beyond the productivity, and beyond the root rot, and beyond the cost of water, and beyond the legislation, the real key to this Society is how we "pack parachutes," is how we affect each other, is how we prepare folks for time of need.

So ... *How's your parachute packed?* That was the first thing that I asked myself... that we ask ourselves, as we're floating down over enemy territory; and I'm looking up, and I'm saying, "how was this parachute packed?" And then I looked down into the

unknown. The enemy is shooting back up at *me*—the *audacity* of the North Vietnamese! They have killed my multi-million-dollar fighter; now they're trying to kill the pilot. And I'll tell you this: *when you're dodging bullets, it's tough to come up with a long range plan.* So I did the only thing that came natural—we did the only thing that came natural: we bowed our heads, and we said a prayer. We asked for a little strength from Above in this time of trial. We didn't pray for any great miracle wind to come whisk us back out to sea, or an eagle to fly by and pick up our parachutes and drop us back on the ship. We prayed for the *guts* it was going to take to survive.

Drifting on down to the ground, captured, and immediately hauled into the prison camp, tortured for military information, political propaganda. After two days of the torture, they tossed me into the little tiny cell that I was going to learn to make as my "home" for the next many years.

I was alone in that cell for several months, and after maybe 200 miles pacing back and forth—three steps one way, three steps the other on that floor—I heard in the far corner, one day, the chirping noise of a cricket, just a little cricket sound over there. I paid no attention, at first. I walked over to find out what it was. It was no cricket at all: a piece of wire, about the gauge of the old bailing wire we used to use in Kansas. It was poked through a hole in the base of the cell wall and scratching on my concrete floor, making this chirping noise I thought originally was a cricket. I watched this wire. I reached down and tugged on the wire and it tugged back, and I tugged and it tugged back; and the third time I tugged, it disappeared. But the wire came back about an hour later. It had a little note wrapped around the end of it. The note was written on a dirty piece of toilet paper ... just blobs on this piece of toilet paper. I could barely make it out, but it said, "Memorize this code; then, eat this note."

Now, if you've ever tasted a Florida avocado ...

I did it. I memorized the code. I ate the note. I sneaked back to the hole in the wall. And I started tugging on that wire, in the code. And was I fortunate. On the other end of that wire, Lt. Commander Bob Schumacher, fighter pilot *extraordinaire*, astronaut candidate—best of all, a parachute packer! A guy who'd give of himself for my benefit, asking nothing in return. He'd been over there for two years, piecing together little bits of wire, stuffing them out a hole in his cell wall and across the storeroom between us—over the boxes and around the shovels, and weaving this little wire through the holes—and fourteen feet later, he's got ahold of Charlie Plumb.

His first words: "How you doin', buddy?"

My first words: "I'm doin' terrible—buddy." "My President sent me over here, right? It's his dirty war, not mine; I didn't start this Vietnam war. And that's not fair. And I'm just a victim of circumstances beyond my control. And the enemy's not playing this game fair; they're torturing prisoners. They're not supposed to be torturing prisoners; and it's not fair, and I'm just a victim of circumstances beyond my control." And I did my job as a pilot. It must have been some mechanic that put that airplane together. It's his fault, not

mine. He ought to be here, in this prison camp, not me. This isn't fair. I'm the victim of circumstances beyond my control."

And Schumacher said, "Do you want to know your biggest problem?" I said, "Do you mean I've got problems bigger than the ones I can see?"

He said, "It sure sounds like it." He said, "It sounds like you're suffering from a very common prison disease. You'll die from this disease if you don't get cured in a hurry."

I said, "What's the name of this disease? Maybe I ought to know something about this."

He said, "Around here we just call it 'Prison Thinking'."

I said, "'Prison Thinking'?"

He said, "Roger! You think you are a prisoner."

I dropped the wire. I looked around in that cell, and I think "What kind of nut have they put me next to? The guy's in orbit, while I think I'm a prisoner! Look, here's the walls. Here's the floor. Here's what I can smell and see and feel. This is reality. I'm in a prison camp. I'm bleeding from four open wounds. I've got boils all over my body. They've taken everything away from me except a rag I have knotted around my waist to hide my nudity. I'm rotting away in a communist prison camp. And to add insult to injury, they've put me next to a Positive Thinker!" That's all I needed, right?

And the only reason I kept tugging on the wire, it was the only ball game in town. I said, "Tell me about this 'Prison Thinking' stuff."

He said, "Don't you see? When a fighter pilot is first shot down," ... or when any of us go through a change in our life or we have the frost of the plants or we have the root rot or we've got the legislation we don't like or we've got the neighbors that are calling us names or we've got the folks picking fruit that aren't on our crew ... He said, "the first emotion —OK, the immediate emotion is, 'Well, this can't be happening to me. I'm bullet-proof, you know, and I must be dreaming this.' But then when it starts to hurt a little bit and you can feel the pain and see the blood," he said, "then the second emotion is, 'Well, okay, it's true that this is happening to me, but I had no control over this; I had no input in the outcome. It's not fair, but I'm just a victim of circumstances beyond my control.'"

He said, "And to substantiate that little thought that maybe it's not your fault, gotta be somebody's fault, right? Right! Blame everybody you can think of. Blame the President for sending you over here. Blame the enemy; they're not playing fair. Blame the mechanic that put your airplane together."

He said, "The problem of this of course is, when you start blaming other people for your problems, you give them control over your life."

When you start blaming other people for your problems, you give them control over your life!

He said, "It's your choice. It doesn't make any difference what's around you. Your success or failure, your survival or your death depends on the choices you make about your surroundings."

He said, "The next part of Prison Thinking is, you're going to shower yourself with pity. You'll end up with a real Pity Party of your own."

"And the final stage" he said, "of Prison Thinking is, you've got to play the role. Read the script. It's an easy script: says 'Prisoner of War' right at the top. Get dirty, ugly, bearded, ragged, skinny, cuss a lot, roll over in the corner, wave your fist, damn your God, atrophy, die if you can. That's the definition of a Prisoner of War."

He said, "I'll tell you this. You play the role—you play the role of the poor helpless California avocado farmer. You shower yourself with pity and try to substantiate your own perceived inadequacies. You blame somebody else for your problem and give away your control if you deny that you have any control of your destiny."

He said, "You're gonna die here—cash it in, hang it up; you're not marching home with the rest of us."

I wouldn't buy this, would you? This is crazy stuff: the whole earthly idea in a communist prison camp, that all I have to do is think my way to success ...

Took me about 200 more miles. Here's what I came up with. You're not going to believe this part.

The barriers in a prison cell aren't the walls. That's not it. The inhibitors to my survival aren't the guards and their AK47s; that wasn't where it was. This is going to be a thinking game. If I think I'm going to live, I'm going to live; if I think I'm going to die, I'm going to die.

I went back to the hole in the wall, and back to tugging on that wire, and said, "You've got my attention now, pal. What's the antidote to my disease? I've got a bad case of this Prison Thinking."

He said, "The first thing you need around here, old buddy, is faith. You've got to be a believer." He said, "You've got to be able to tap into a source of strength and power, and parade it in yourself." He said, "The second thing you need around here is commitment; you've got to be dog-determined."

Oh, here's something he said; you can identify with this part.

He said, "Sometimes in this prison cell, we just don't have enough information to make a proper analysis. So we do what's right because it's right."

Do it right because it's right.

Wow!

How many times in agriculture we forget our heritage. How many times in this day and age of high-tech stuff do we try to measure things right down to the last decimal? How many times in agriculture do we try to overpower the plant with technology? In reality, like our dads and our granddads and their granddads did, they just did it right because it was right.

"So those three factors, faith and commitment," he said, "and personal pride. You've got to think of yourself as a good enough person, you're going to overcome these problems. One of these days, you're going to march out of here—proud American, with your head held high."

Those three panels in my parachute—*faith, commitment, pride*—were more important than the rice that I ate or the water that I drank in North Vietnam. Other guys packed parachutes, too. I don't think the 592 of us POWs would be alive today if it hadn't been for our dependence on each other.

Yes, we can operate alone, as an avocado grower. And we don't really need to come to these meetings. And, yeah, we can read about it. But you know things are happening so fast; and if we don't get together—if we don't get together on some of these issues, it's not going to happen to any particular person.

As Congressman Lagomarsino said, I know John McCain—I went to the Naval Academy with John McCain's brother Joe—and those of you who know the senator or have seen pictures of him will probably know that early in life, he was gray. In fact, he had fluorescent hair. It was really something. In flight training, he had a whole head of fluorescent hair. Well, then I got shot down, put in a prison camp. There I was in a cell. I had a roommate at this time, Kay Russell, and peeking through a hole in the door, we knew there was a new POW down the cell block. We knew that guy was really beat up, because all we could see was bloody rags tossed out of that cell every few days. And then they told us that a delegation was coming to North Vietnam to look at some of the POWs, and they were going to bring some of the famous ones out. Now, we hadn't had any news from this guy. We had tried to communicate with the guy that was in that cell and all beat up, but we didn't know who he was. We had tried and tapped on his wall, but he didn't seem to tap back. We tried to pass notes to him. And we had to figure out that he was just totally non-ambulatory; the guy was on a stretcher in there, and maybe he wasn't even conscious most of the time.

Well, a couple of days before this delegation was to show up, they started cleaning some of us up to see the delegation. And I'm peeking out this hole in my door and I can



see outside this cell, the injured man, the biggest pile of fluorescent hair I'd ever seen. And I turned to my roommate, and I said, "I think John McCain's been shot down. I think that's him. That's got to be him in that cell." Well, McCain as you know was from a long line of Navy admirals. Most of the family had gone to the Naval Academy. And so the next time I walked past his cell on my way to the sewer to empty my "honey-bucket," I walked past there, and I whistled [the speaker here whistled the first bars of Anchors Aweigh], and I walked on to the sewer and I dumped my bucket. On the way back to my cell, I could hear from inside his cell [the speaker now whistled the next bars of Anchors Aweigh], and I knew it was John McCain.

And that's kind of the way that we kept things going. Sometimes it was knocks on the wall. Sometimes it was notes on pieces of toilet paper. Sometimes it was tugs on wires. Sometimes all we could do was whistle Anchors Aweigh to each other.

Well, the day finally came. After six years in a prison camp, they told us the war was over. Here's how it happened: The "Rat" came in. We didn't like the "Rat"; he was the camp commander. He looked at us seated there—there were several of us in that particular cell—and he said, "The peace treaty has been signed. We're trading prisoners. Get on the bus. It's outside the gate."

Our senior man, Jim Pierie stood up—skinny guy from Eight Mile, Alabama. He looked at the camp commander and he said, "Sir, we're not going home until all the sick and injured men have left this camp." And the "Rat" couldn't understand this; and the "Rat" said, "Pierie, you don't understand my English. Don't you see what's happening here? I'm offering you your freedom!"

I'll never forget Jim Pierie's words. They ring in my ears like it was yesterday. He stood up and he said, "Sir, freedom is vital to us, but not without our integrity. Send the sick and injured guys home, and then we'll go"

Wow! That gets right down to the very base, doesn't it?

It gets right down to the question, what are you willing to live for, and what are you willing to die for, and what will you sell your integrity for?

A little extra profit? A little bigger share of the market? What will you sell your integrity for? Oh, that's O.K., Charlie; you know a little slip here and a little slip there, it's not a big deal.

I would suggest to you that your success in this avocado business, or your success in life depends a whole lot on where your integrity lies and at what value you place that.

The "Rat" hauled Jim Pierie out of there, roughed him up pretty good, put him in the stockade—rice and water. And the camp commander, the "Rat", came back to the rest of us and said, "Your senior guy, Pierie, has gone nuts; but the rest of you can still go home. You won't be penalized if you'll get out of here and get on the bus."

We had a little huddle in that prison cell. If you can imagine: here we are—O.K., you and me, scruffy, tired, skinny, homesick guys—we've got to decide whether to do this or not. You know what we came up—here's the conclusion we came up with. Nobody's going to believe this. Nobody's going to believe this! We knew that this war was not popular back in the States, and if they took a poll of all the people of the United States, especially of our mothers and our wives, even the fliers, our pilots, our brothers still flying airplanes off the ships, and asked them what to do, they would say, "Get the hell out of there, you guys. What kind of foundation are you trying to stand on here? What are you trying to do to yourselves? Take any chance to get out of that prison."

They're not going to believe this. They're not going to believe this! But we can't go. We can't leave the guys here who need American medical aid. And we stood up there and in a unison voice we said, "Send the guys home who need American medical care, and then we'll go."

The camp commander slammed that cell door closed. We didn't know if it would ever open again. He marched up to the head shed, and you could hear him holler all the way. He came back about an hour later with an IBM printout, a manifest of the first planeload of guys. It was signed by an ambassador. The first planeload of guys had gone, and the computerized list was also our prayer list: the sick and injured ... they were on the first flight. Now it was our turn. Still no rush for the bus. No hugging and kissing. No jumping for joy. I kept waiting and wondering, when are we going to let our hair down, and realize we're going home?

You know, it wasn't until we climbed aboard that airplane, it wasn't until we'd rolled down the runway, it wasn't really until we finally lifted off enemy soil we all broke loose and started hugging and kissing ... the Air Force nurses.

What a journey you and I've just been through, huh? We went from top-gun to the depths of despair, but now look at us! Man, we're flying high again. Look at this! We're free! We've been through such a trying time; but we survived, and we're on our way home! And when we hit the deck at Clark Air Force base and ran across that tarmac and called that little girl I had married after the Naval Academy, my highschool sweetheart, to tell her the good news, about all these gifts that I'd figured out to send her and all the time we were going to spend together and all the great meals we were going to eat and the vacations we were going to take and the six years we were going to make up for ... and she had gone.

Just about the time you think you've survived ... just about the time you think you're back on top, that you see the light at the end of the tunnel ... just about the time you think you've got it made ...

I got a lot of good advice from a lot of well-meaning people around my home in Kansas. They were saying, "Sue her and her boyfriend for doing that to you. Put her in jail, and you'll feel better." The psychologist said, "Charlie, you need to get angry about all this.

You need to get this out of your system. Get bitter. If anybody in the world has a right to be bitter, you have the right to be bitter." Imagine that, somebody telling me I have the right to be bitter. That's like me telling you you have the right to have hemorrhoids. We've been here for an hour now, and we have the right ...

Waking up after six years of sleep, and I'm saying to myself, "I didn't learn a whole lot over there, but there are some basic principles that we all learn when we go through this kind of a journey together."

And I suppose the first principle is, we really have more strength from within than we give ourselves credit ... and we really can take more than we thought we could.

And the second thing is, how the basic principles of life apply in a prison camp or in the avocado business. If you can keep the faith ... and if you can keep the commitment ... and you can keep the pride ... and you can keep your integrity, then the rest of the things are going to fall into place.

Well, we came home, and were successful, and we've done great things. Five hundred ninety-two American prisoners of war came home from Vietnam. So far, we've produced two United States senators, we've produced 27 admirals or generals from that number, we've produced all kinds of doctors and lawyers and preachers and teachers, and we have bishops and judges and mayors and you name it. And the medical community tells us that we, the ex-POWs are healthier today, mentally and physically, than if we hadn't been shot down. Figure that out.

Schumaker, the guy on the end of the wire—he's a two-star admiral today. My co-pilot came back to the States, went back to flying Navy jets ... some guys never learn. My ex-wife married the guy she was engaged to ... they're living happily ever after; and I live with my lovely wife, Cathy, and our two wonderful children on our hilltop in Santa Barbara.

What's the message, Charlie? OK, I understand. We started here, we went to here, and we started ... we had a little blip, and now we're back on top. Let me tell you what the message is. Here it is.

Cathy and I and Joseph and Evie were back in Kansas for the fourth of July, and my mother apologized to me again, as she frequently does ... now, you have to understand, my mother's a saint. I know that a lot of you think your mother's a saint, but I'll put my mother up against your mother any day ... and she said again, "I'm sorry you had to go through that, Charlie. I wish you'd been successful on your seventy-fifth mission."

I said, "Mom, you know ... I love you and I appreciate that, but don't you see what's happening here? I mean, can't you see that I'm a better person because of that adversity? Don't you see now what I've got that I wouldn't have had? If I had been successful on Mission 75, it might have been the biggest diaster of my life."

And so I guess, in closing, I can wish you lots of successes, lots of happiness. I could wish you guaranteed streets paved with gold for the rest of your life. But I guess I realize that you really wouldn't be here today if you didn't have a little root rot in your life. Come on, let's get serious. Would you be as good as you are today if you didn't have any competition? If you hadn't been through some of those trials? Six years is a long time to spend in a prison camp; and while I wouldn't wish it on anybody here, I'd say it's the most valuable six years of my life.

But the question is, how do you do this? And the answer is this: If you could pack parachutes, OK? If you can get together in a team like this, and pull the same direction on the same rope; if you can be in the same room with some of your competitors here, and talk about the success of this industry; if you can apply the faith and the commitment and the personal pride, the integrity, and the basic things of life—you can do anything you set your mind to do. Great being with you. Thank you very much.