

ATTACHMENT 5: WHO'S PACKING YOUR PARACHUTE?

The story is told about Charles Plumb, who was a U.S. Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. After seventy-five combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted in to enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a Communist Vietnamese prison. Plumb survived the ordeal, and he now spends his time lecturing on the lessons he learned from that experience.

One day when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said excitedly, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk! You were shot down!" "How in the world did you know that?" asked the amazed Plumb. The man replied, "I packed your parachute." Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. While he was recovering from his speechlessness, the man pumped his hand and said, "Well, guess it worked!" Plumb regained his composure and assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today." And they parted.

End of coincidence, end of story? Not quite. You see, Plumb couldn't sleep that night. He kept thinking about that man. Plumb says:

I kept wondering what he might have looked like back then in a Navy uniform: a white hat, a bib in the back, and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said, "Good morning, how are you?" or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot, and he was just a sailor.

Plumb then began to think of the many hours that ordinary sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know.

Having thought long and hard about this meeting, Plumb now asks his audience when he lectures, "Who's packing your parachute?" his point is that everyone has someone who has packed their parachutes, who has blessed them, who had provided what they need to make it through the day.

Plumb points out that in fact he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory. He needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute. He called on all these supports before reaching safety. Somebody had put them there, had richly blessed him, and he was grateful and determined to pass on that blessing.

Who blessed you this week? Who packed your parachute?