

Who's Packing Your Parachute?

By Dr Bil I Webster

I recently came across the following story that really got me thinking!

Charles Plumb was a U.S. Navy jet pilot during the Vietnam War. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected from the plane, and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent the next 6 years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on 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, "You're Major 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 Plumb.

"I packed your parachute," the man replied.

The Major gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and said, "I guess it worked!" Plumb assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today."

Charles Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man. He later wrote, "I kept wondering what he might have looked like 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 else because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor." Plumb thought of the many hours the 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, each time holding in his hands the fate of someone he didn't know.

This story got me thinking of the people who helped pack *my* parachute. Oh, I have never been in the armed forces, nor would I relish the idea of jumping out of a plane. I'm thinking of another kind of parachute, one which all of us need in life.

It was thirty two years ago this very day, as I write, that my Dad died. I guess I have lived most of my adult life without him. But before he died, he helped pack my parachute. Throughout my childhood, he taught me values, he showed me

compassion and concern, I inherited his sense of humor. And all these years after his death, I have not forgotten. To be honest, I appreciate it more now than ever. His legacy was not in money, but in example, in principles, in ideals and in dreams. I've used that parachute many times throughout my own life, and today, I am reflecting on the one who helped pack that parachute, so that it would not tangle or be useless when it was most required.

When I am in Scotland this month, I will spend some time with Bob Clapham. Bob has been the town missionary in Arbroath for over 50 years and was a big influence on my life when I was a teenager. In one way, he has been like a father figure to me, and I am glad that I have had the chance on numerous occasions to thank him for his encouragement and his interest in me throughout the years.

Actually, the more I think about it, there are so many people who have helped pack my parachute over the years. My music teacher, my friends, my wife would be included, but there is a longer list than I realized. All of these significant people have helped put the wind in my sails when I needed to move forward, and the air in my parachute when I needed to slow down or was heading for a fall.

May I ask you something? "*Who's packing your parachute?*" Who are the people who are working and praying to help you make it through the day. Are they family, friends, part of the community? All may be involved in providing something that you take so much for granted. Who's packing your parachute? Isn't it about time you gave them some recognition.

Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day. Oh, sure! I realize that most of us have to be pretty expert at packing our OWN parachutes too. But all too often we fail to recognize the contribution of the people we live with, work alongside, our friends and colleagues and acknowledge what they bring to our lives. Until it is too late, that is.

Charles Plumb needed a functioning parachute when his plane was shot down over enemy territory. But all of us need many kinds of parachutes in life. There are physical parachutes, mental parachutes, emotional parachutes, and spiritual parachutes. Without them, we will tumble to the ground with a crash.

Sometimes in the daily challenges that life gives us, we miss what is really important. We may fail to say hello, please, or thank you, congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them, give a compliment, or just do

something nice for no reason. As you go through this week, recognize people who pack your parachute.

But there's another question. "*Whose parachute are you packing?*" It's a long tedious job, but you'd better be diligent, for someone's life may be depending on the work you are doing.

You may not get recognized for it, or thanked for the efforts you put in, but maybe someday someone will realize just what you've done to help them make a safe landing. And even if you don't get the appreciation you deserve, at least you will have the satisfaction of a job well done.

They say a smile is your umbrella. I prefer to think of it as my parachute. Happy landings.