

Who Is Packing Your Parachute?



As I was teaching a new surgical skill to one of my residents last month, I was reminded of how it is that just these “moments” in a resident’s life, all strung together, make for a fulfilling surgical career. And as I thought about this, I was reminded of one Charles Plumb, a US Naval Academy graduate, who was a jet pilot in Vietnam.

After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy lands. He was captured and spent 6 years in a North

Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons 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 Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*. You were shot down!” Plumb asked, “How in the world did you know that?” “I packed your parachute,” the man replied.

Plumb 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.”

Plumb couldn’t sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, “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.

Now, Plumb asks his audience, “Who’s packing your parachute?”

So now I ask you, who’s packing **your** parachute? I’m asking specifically as it relates to your ability to thrive as a foot and ankle surgeon. Clearly, the answer would include those who have taught, loved, and supported us, but it would also include organizations that care for our intellectual needs long after our residency training diplomas are hung on a wall.

For me, that parachute must include the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS). There simply is no other professional surgical organization in the world that provides so much value to you and me as foot and ankle surgeons—from world-class surgical skills courses, to the *Journal of Foot & Ankle Surgery*, to incredible offerings of the ACFAS and FootHealthFacts Web sites, to the pinnacle of foot and ankle surgical conferences, the ACFAS Annual Scientific Conference. All of these, taken together, ensure that we progress through our careers seamlessly and always at the top of our game. There is simply no substitute for the ACFAS. So I guess the real question is, who do you **trust** to pack your parachute?

As your incoming president of the ACFAS, I will do my best to ensure that this organization always packs your parachute to push the envelope in the realm of education, research, skills, and professional relations. Best to you all in 2011.

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