

Slipping the Bonds

Neil Jennings

INTRODUCTION

When I was in my late teens, perhaps a few years before I became a Christian, I had a favorite saying that made me laugh out loud. I said it all the time and it went like this: *Life is a sucking swirling eddy of despair in an ever-darkening universe that will eventually end in total black.*

I don't know why I thought it was so funny. Maybe it was because it was so depressing. Who knows? Anyway, I didn't start life as a jaded person, but by my mid-teens, I had gone through a couple of major family events that turned me into a cynical and unhappy person. For those of you who know my favorite birthday song, I also learned that song at about the same time I learned the *eddy of despair saying*. They went hand in hand in the world I was living in at the time.

Anyway, a few years later, and through a series of fantastic events, I turned to Christ and embarked on a long journey, during which time I have been able to shed most of those pieces of cynicism that I carried with me. Sometime not long after I became a Christian, I forgot all about the *eddy of despair saying*. I had a hope and a future. I learned that there was something to look forward to, both in the present here and now and in the life to come.

The point is, before I became a Christian an *eddy of despair* and an *ever-darkening future* were the absolute best I could hope for. After I became a Christian, I gained a confidence in where my life was heading and in how things would turn out in the long run. I learned there is so much more to look forward to than the depressing stuff our liberal professors teach in school.

No disrespect intended, but for those who folks don't believe in God, there is no hope in what happens after their life is over, and the end of life is truly an *eddy of despair*. But for those who are willing to reach out to him, God offers an eternity of happiness, joy, and love. God's word says that in heaven, there will be no more death, or sorrow, or pain, and that God will wipe all our tears away. Even if there is only one chance in a gazillion that that could happen, isn't it worth looking into? God loves you and wants you to be with him in heaven forever. The only thing he asks is that you take a step toward him. That you take a chance and believe.

Some people don't want to believe that there is a god. They imagine the universe started out, somehow full of atoms, which somehow came together with massive amounts of pressure and force, which was created by an unknown source, and then all by itself it spontaneously exploded. They believe that after that the inexplicably created matter miraculously organized itself into suns, moons, planets, solar systems, universes, and on and on. Then, by some unknown life spontaneously erupted. Over time, prehistoric organisms rearranged themselves

into a series of increasingly complex creatures that, contrary to the laws of thermodynamics, evolved into the complex life forms that we have on earth today. But what if none of that is true?

For those who don't believe in "God the Creator," they serve a nameless faceless god that includes unexplained matter, inexplicable forces, zillions of consecutive miracles, and billions of years of time. Like any religion they worship at an altar, and in their attempt to give their god some form of validity they call him or her "science." Who can argue against that god? It's the god that can never be challenged, and which never needs to be proven. Science pretends to know everything, but it is completely incapable of proving how complete nothingness could have somehow become all that we see today. Try to prove this in a lab: Take absolute nothing, make nothing turn into something, make it explode without any outside force, then see if you can make it create just one star and one planet.

I commend those who serve the god of science. Their faith is incredible. It's amazing even. Some of them defend their god with an admirable level of religious zeal. Their faith in their god is truly impressive.

Can we have an honest moment here? I was once one of those people who unreservedly believed the *big bang theory* and *evolution* theory could explain life. Maybe that's why I believed the universe would eventually end in total darkness, as the stars used up their remaining fuel and burned out. I am so glad that I am not that person anymore, and I never ever want to go back to how I was before I believed there is a God who created the universe.

The vast majority of Christians feel exactly the same way as I do. None of us ever wants to back to how our lives were before Christ. We have a future to look forward to. It's fantastic, having the confidence of knowing that we will spend eternity in heaven with our Creator. How awesome will that be?

A few of you who know me know that I always wanted to write a book. Actually, I wanted to write a fiction, but I never was able to get one started. The truth is, I'm not smart enough to write a decent book---not one that people would actually want to pay for and to read anyway. I just don't have that kind of imagination.

So here I am. I finally got write the book I always dreamed about, sort of, except it's not THAT book, but it is A BOOK. And it took being diagnosed with cancer before I finally got the motivation to sit down and do it. And all of those dumb things that I never got to say before in print? Well, here they are!

If you decide to read this, you will quickly figure out that this is a book about nothing important, and it's one that makes no sense when taken on the whole. Somewhere along the way you might ask, "How can a book have recipes, Bible verses, and stupid stories that are told by a fat, old, retired, washed up, "has been," Naval Aviator?" Good question, but some things can't be

explained by logic, and this book is one of them. In my small mind, all of these categories fit perfectly together, and I'm happy with direction this project has taken. I hope you get something out of it, but if you decide to toss it in the trash, I totally do not blame you for that.

So what does title *Slipping the Bonds* mean, anyway? I'll explain all that in a story near the very end. If you stick it out that far, the last few pages will make it clear why this title is appropriate for my book, and just for the record, it has nothing to do with escaping from jail, or getting out of handcuffs, or anything of that sort!

I've done my best in writing and editing this, but I don't have the time or energy to get it perfect. My apologies. And for those of you who are more skilled at the English language than I, please try not to criticize too much. I ran out of time, my editor was on vacation, I couldn't find a cab, my tux was in the cleaners, there was a flood, somebody stole my car, a herd of javelinas trampled my only copy, please forgive me!!!

Anyway, thank you so very much for your friendship and support. You are awesome, and I love you!

Neil



FAVORITE BIBLE STUFF

One day I was sitting around thinking I wanted to write out a few things out about a couple of Bible topics that have inspired me over the years. This section could have been called “doctrine” instead of “stuff,” but there are also topics that are not doctrine. Therefore, to borrow a term from Rick, this chapter is appropriately labeled *Bible Stuff*. And that’s what it truly is.

The latter acknowledged, Bible doctrine is an amazing area of study. It helps us understand the details on what we believe regarding major and minor points of Scripture. Often doctrine can divide us more than it unites us, and although my intention is to remain non-controversial here, I would like to stimulate some minor brain activity along the way. You don’t have to agree with me on everything, but as long as you know what you believe and why, then you are well ahead of the pack.

CREATION VERSUS EVOLUTION

My evolution story begins in college. As a new believer, I found myself wrestling with what the Bible taught regarding the origins of life. It conflicted with what I was learning in class. At the time, I was 100% tuned in to the creation versus evolution controversy. I read everything I could get my hands on. The ongoing debate was furious, and from the academic viewpoint science seemed to be winning.

In the 1980s, it wasn’t so much that science was winning the evolution argument, but the bigger factor was that the godless professors who taught the classes had total control of the discussion. They directed the conversation, they made points that supported their beliefs while squashing dissent, and they made a spectacle out of anyone who would dare to bring up an argument to the contrary. There was no such thing as “freedom of speech” in the classroom. Those who believed in Creation quickly learned that their grades would be affected if they voiced an opinion.

How strange that time was. My parents paid good money to have close-minded educators indoctrinate me in the religion of evolution. They worshiped at the altar of Darwinism and encouraged their students to do the same. Unbelievably, many of our professors squandered a disproportionate amount of classroom time preaching the tenants of atheism. The university experience was all about changing the way we thought. Perhaps it’s still the same today.

In my classes many of my professors were gods in their own minds. They were the sole and final arbiters of truth. There was no discussion, only propaganda, indoctrination, and consent. You joined up with their religion, and you served their god, or you risked ridicule.

As I considered my formal education, from grade school to university, I realized that evolution had been hammered into me from day one, beginning with my very first science lesson in elementary school. The indoctrination never stopped. Evolution was portrayed as fact, and there

was no room for discussion.

However, as I began looking into the arguments, both for and against evolution, I discovered something profound. I learned that evolution is not a proven scientific fact that conforms to the basic tenants of science.

Science must be unbiased, observable, testable, provable, and testing must be repeatable. Yet, throughout the history of science, evolution has never been tested or proven to any scientific level. Evolution is purported to be an indisputable fact, but the very best case that can be made about it is that it's a complex and continually evolving system of theories.

Evolutionists state that their proof is in the fossil record, but Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, once observed, "*The number of intermediate varieties which have formerly existed on earth must be truly enormous. Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain.*" If Charles Darwin himself, states that the fossil record does not support step-by-step evolution, then what conclusion must be drawn from the observable evidence? The only logical conclusion is that proof does not exist.

In the years since my days at Fresno State I have kept up on the evolution debate, and during that time I've observed that evolutionists have to continuously reinvent the mechanisms of evolution as each new explanation is eventually disproven.

Every few years new and more outrageous theories are invented to take the place of old theories. In fact, you could say that the only thing evolving in evolution is the theory itself. None of Darwin's original foundational explanations of evolution have survived to the present day. Almost everything he wrote and believed in has been disproven.

In 1976 a noteworthy London geologist said, "*It must be significant that nearly all the evolutionary stories I learned as a student have now been debunked.*" (Dr. Derek V. Ager, Department of Geology, Imperial College, London). Imagine how little credibility Christianity would have if there were a group that controlled the Bible, and who wrote major revisions every few years to the text. That is exactly what has happened in evolution theory, yet its believers are undeterred as they continue to defend evolution to the death.

On rare occasions, a member of the scientific community will talk honestly about their beliefs. Such was the case when Dr. George Wald stated the following, "*There are only two possibilities as to how life arose. One is spontaneous generation arising to evolution; the other is a supernatural creative act of God. There is no third possibility. Spontaneous generation, that life arose from non-living matter was scientifically disproved 120 years ago by Louis Pasteur and others. That leaves us with the only possible conclusion that life arose as a supernatural creative act of God. I will not accept that philosophically because I do not want to believe in*"

God. Therefore, I choose to believe in that which I know is scientifically impossible; spontaneous generation arising to evolution" (Wald, George, Professor Emeritus of Biology at the University at Harvard, Scientific American, Vol. 199, p. 100).

Dr. Wald plainly stated that his rejection of God was the singular factor that compelled him to believe in evolution. Unbelievable. Dr. Wald, like many of his peers, lived in a world that rejected God as a higher power. This rejection allowed him to live a life that was not accountable to God, and isn't that the main point behind the theory? Isn't it all about having the freedom to live a godless life?

For many evolution is an easy path to immorality, which allows them to indulge their rebellious nature. After God is removed from the picture, there is no morality, no accountability, no right, and no wrong. We have seen profound changes in American society in the last two decades, many of which have come about as a direct result of evolution and atheism. Are we better or worse off from these changes?

Even today, hostile and godless individuals continue to prop up the theory of evolution by using subterfuge and deception. They are now confusing the debate through subtle manipulations of terminology.

For example, "Macroevolution" is what both sides of the debate are referring to when they use the word "evolution." Macroevolution refers to the change that allegedly takes place when one species "evolves" into a different species. The "different species" distinction is critical, because that is the crux of the matter. There is no known mechanism that can cause one species to evolve into a different species (macroevolution), and when we talk about whether or not evolution is a fact or a theory, we're talking about macroevolution.

In contrast, "microevolution" comprises the small changes that take place within a species over time, to include the minor adaptations of a species to its environment.

Evolutionists point to microevolution and state that therefore evolution from one species to another must be true.

Everyone believes in microevolution. It is something we can observe, test, and prove. Species adapt to their environment. That is well known. However, when an evolutionist points to microevolution and makes a case for change from one species to another, they are knowingly making a flawed argument. It is a proven fact that microevolution, times eons of time, does not lead to macroevolution.

As an example, the DNA in a present day dog is the same as the DNA that was in the first dog. As dogs change over time, a dog is still a dog. No matter how many changes dogs go through, they will never become horse. A horse has a vastly different genetic make up than a dog, and a

dog cannot spontaneously evolve into a horse over time. DNA is marvelous, it's miraculous, but it's not that flexible.

In addition to understanding the limitations of DNA, a basic understanding of the *second law of thermodynamics* and the *principal of entropy* help us to understand why the theory of macroevolution not true sciences. These two principals are proven beyond a shadow of doubt and they are foundational to science. Together the *second law of thermodynamics* and the *principal of entropy* show us that over a period of time there is a natural decline that occurs, and that all matter naturally goes from an orderly state into a disorderly state.

As an example, consider that new, shiny, and perfect car that you purchased a few years ago. How's that car looking now? How about your house, what happens to that over time? We don't need a PhD to understand how *entropy* and the *second law of thermodynamics* works. We see it all around us every day. Over time, things naturally progress from an organized state to a disorganized state.

Belief in evolution requires its adherents to accept the opposite of *thermodynamics* and *entropy*. The theory of evolution states that less complex creatures evolve and become more complex over time. In order to accept evolution, you have to throw out foundational principles of science, and you have to believe that organisms can somehow go from less complex to more complex. For the evolutionist, *entropy* and the *second law of thermodynamics* must be discarded.

One of the most compelling arguments for the theory of evolution is that the majority of secular scientists and academicians unquestioningly accept macroevolution as fact. In rebuttal, I say that we should also remember that at one time the majority of all scientists believed that the world was flat, and at that point it was heresy to say otherwise. Our perception of the world is constantly changing, based upon new discoveries, new technologies, new theories, and new scientific techniques. What's commonly accepted today could easily be disproven tomorrow. It's madness to think that today's version of science knows everything that there is to know about the universe.

For the most part, we are an egotistical culture. With our smart phones, our computers, and our internet, we like to believe that everything about how we got here can be explained. However, we neglect to consider the main question, which is *how matter was created?* This foundational question precedes all others. Without matter, there's no Creation, no evolution, no sun, no earth, and no sky. There is nothing. So, how was matter created, and who put it here? Science is unable to address this.

The Big Bang Theory provides us with a ton of detail on how galaxies and solar systems may have been formed after a massive explosion, but it does not adequately address where the molecules and/or photons came from before they exploded. The big question regarding who loaded the gun and pulled the trigger cannot be answered.

The Bible talks about the first moment of creation in a simple and elegant way, “God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” (Gen 1:3). So, when there’s an explosion what’s the first thing we see? Obviously, we see a very bright light. Isn’t it interesting that the Biblical explanation of creation, which was written more than 1,000 years ago, backs up the Big Bang theory? When science is on the right track, the Bible doesn’t conflict with science. Rather it reinforces it.

The Bible also addresses where matter came from. “The universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (Heb 11:3). In other words, *God spoke matter into being*. It’s fascinating to me that God could have left this part out of the Bible, but he didn’t. Perhaps he anticipated that someday we’d ask the question of how matter came into being, and he didn’t want to leave us wondering.

My humble opinion is that the Biblical explanation of how we got here is just as valid as the explanations science offers. For me, it’s much easier to believe in an all-powerful God than in nameless, faceless matter that pre-existed, plus pressure, plus an explosion, plus organization into universes and solar systems, plus spontaneous eruption of life, plus evolution, plus, plus, plus, etc.

As one scientist put it, *"The miracles required to make evolution feasible are far greater in number and far harder to believe than the miracle of creation"* (Dr. Richard Bliss, former professor of biology and science education at Christian Heritage College, "It Takes A Miracle For Evolution"). I heartily concur!

It’s probably worth mentioning that there are tens of thousands of scientists who reject the theory of evolution and who embrace Creation and “intelligent design.” Unfortunately, the “flat earth” culture invests so much effort trying to disprove God that Creation Scientist viewpoints are rarely acknowledged. Regardless, many of them are continually at work researching topics, publishing papers, and producing proofs that support Creation from a scientific viewpoint. Creation and science are not mutually exclusive, but they go hand in hand.

I make no apologies for my beliefs, nor do I apologize for my passion in talking about the Creation explanation of the universe. I have a passion that is fueled by decades of being indoctrinated by closed-minded people whose driving ambition was total and complete rejection of God. I nearly followed them into their abyss of hopeless thinking, but thank God there’s an alternative for us to consider.

God offers us a future and a hope. He reaches his hand out toward us and only asks that we take a step in his direction. The future is bright for those who choose to open their hearts and walk toward him. God has prepared an amazing heaven that will last an eternity for those of us who choose to follow him.

My sincere desire is that everyone whose future is an *eddy of despair* will give God a chance and take a step in his direction. Salvation is free. It costs God his only Son, but it costs us absolutely nothing. We only need to accept Jesus and follow him.

The great news is that our price for a ticket into heaven has already been paid. God offers to send us on an all-expense-paid trip into eternity, where we will spend forever with family, friends, and the one who created us. Heaven is an all-inclusive resort where there will be an endless celebration. Don't you want to be there too? Don't get left out. What is the value of a ticket to such a place? I submit that it's worth more than the value of all the gold, silver, and precious metals in the entire earth.

In the end there will be two groups of people. Both groups will consist of sinners equally deserving of God's wrath. However, one group will be saved because they chose God. The other group will face judgement, and they will come up short. ["Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."](#) (John 3:36)

I accepted Christ when I was 19, and I never turned back. I thank God every day that he rescued me from my *eddy of despair* and gave me a future and a hope. He offers that same future to everyone. He loves us all equally, no matter who we are, how well or how poorly we've lived our life, no matter what we've done. No matter what. Call on him and ask him to reveal himself to you in a miraculous way today. Don't give up. He loves you so much, and he's just waiting for you to take a step toward him.

["Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me"](#) (Rev 3:20).

THE BIBLE

Despite our culture's best attempts to make the Bible seem irrelevant and foolish, for tens or perhaps hundreds of millions of us it is the single most important book we will ever own. Over the centuries, many have tried to destroy the Bible and eliminate it, but in spite of their best efforts the Bible remains fully intact, and there is no sign that its popularity is will diminish anytime soon.

The Bible is a source of daily inspiration for Christians from every culture, language, and location on earth. For those of us who recognize the treasure that is within its pages, it's our "Owner's Manual" on how to do life. The Bible teaches us what we need to know in order to successfully navigate through our short time on earth. Psalm 1 says, [Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.](#) (Ps 1:1-3)

The Bible is an amazing book in that it transcends time and culture. It delivers a truth that cannot be bought or sold, changed or bartered, determined through consensus, or derived via a democratic process. Everything the Bible tells us is just as true today as it was 1,000 years ago, and if the earth lasts another 1,000 years the truths in the Bible will be just as relevant then as they are today.

For Christians, the Bible is the Lord's word, inspired by God, written by man, and perfect in every way. [The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.](#) (Ps 12:6).

The Bible is organized front to back, cover to cover, focused on a single story that God wants us to know---that he needs us to know! The story is all about God's love for us and the lengths he's willing to go in order to have a relationship with us. No matter who we are, no matter where we live, no matter what we have done or have not done, God loves us so much. And he demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son Jesus to live a perfect life on earth, to die on the cross, and to point the way to heaven. The 66 books of the Bible are woven together in a way that makes them into one story. Every book in the Old and New Testament points to Jesus, and in doing so they emphasize the eternal significance of knowing him.

The Bible's usefulness for daily living is well known amongst the millions of us who use it as our "Owner's Manual" for life. As Timothy aptly states, [All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.](#) (2 Tim 3:16-17).

The Bible is inspired divine revelation. Although 40 men wrote it over a period spanning 1,500 years it's remarkable how it weaves together a timeless story. It's been painstakingly

documented, meticulously transcribed, and carefully translated. It's been passed down from generation to generation completely intact and with no changes. No other book in the world has received as close of scrutiny as the Bible. If there were problems with its authenticity, they would have been brought out a long time ago. But the Bible is still here, and it continues to thrive today. It is the key that unlocks essential knowledge that we need.

A couple of interesting facts about the Bible:

- Approximately 168,000 new Bibles are distributed and/or sold in the U.S. every day.
- There are 3,268 prophecies from the Bible that have been fulfilled and 3,140 that are yet to be fulfilled.
- “God” and “Lord” appear in the Bible a combined total of nearly 11,000 times.
- The exact middle verse in the bible is Psalms 103:2-3, [Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities and who heals all your diseases.](#)
- The Bible is the most widely distributed book of all time with somewhere between 5 and 7 billion copies printed.
- The second most popular book in the world is “Quotations from Chairman Mao,” which has had more than 800 million copies printed.
- Coming in third, the Koran is approaching 800 million copies printed.
- The Koran has around 77,000 words and is less than one-tenth as long as the Bible, which has more than 780,000 words. The New Testament alone has 180,500 words.
- The Bible has been translated into more than 1,200 languages, the New Testament into 1,400 languages, and the Gospel of Mark into 2,400 languages. Jesus said, [“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away.”](#) (Mark 13:31).
- Speaking about the future Jesus said, [“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”](#) (Matt 24:14). We can tell that we are living in the last days, because we are rapidly approaching a point in time when every person on earth will have had an opportunity to hear the Gospel. With the explosion of television and the internet, the Bible is truly being preached to the “whole world.”
- Voltaire, a French philosopher, once bragged that it took 12 men to plant Christianity (the apostles) and that he, just one man, would end Christianity by himself. Although Voltaire's

prediction didn't come true, a number of years after Voltaire's death his house and his printing press were used to print Bibles. God truly has a great sense of humor.

- An atheist named Lee Strobel embarked on an effort to disprove the claims made about Christ, but after examining the evidence, he changed course and became a Christian. From there he went on to author several famous books including "The Case for Faith."

There is so much more than what is listed here, but the bottom line is that although the Bible is universally available, nobody is going to force us to pick it up and read it. It's up to us to drag it off the shelf, blow the dust off, crack it open, and look and see what God has to say to us personally. God's Word is the one place we can go every day and clearly hear his voice.

There is truth, healing, love, peace, and eternal life in the God's Word. Open your Bible today, and ask God to speak to your heart. Ask him to talk to you about where you are at in your life, right at this very moment. God is faithful, he loves you, and he will do it.

THE OLD COVENANT

The Old Covenant (OC) is a fascinating area of study, and arguably, it is the most important agreement God made with Israel. It basically stated that if Israel remained faithful to God by obeying his laws, then God would be their God, and the nation of Israel would be his people. [Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.](#) (Ex 19:5).

When Moses presented God's OC promise to Israel, they unhesitatingly accepted it. [The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said."](#) (Ex 19:8). Without reservation, they agreed to be bound by God's terms.

At face value, the OC was a fantastic offer. All God's people had to do was obey a few hundred simple laws, and in return, they would receive his divine presence, his protection, and his unending blessing. Great deal, right? It was a great offer, but in the end, Israel broke God's laws in dramatic ways, creating all kinds of conflict along the way. Israel was unable to hold up their end of the bargain, not because they were Israel, but because they were human. Unfortunately, we humans don't tend to perform our best under rule-based systems that demand 100% compliance, but that was what Israel signed up for, and as a result, the Old Covenant was destined to fail from the very beginning.

Thank God that we don't live under the OC today. There are approximately 600 commandments in the Law of Moses, and if you broke only one of the laws, you were as guilty as if you had broken them all. But the brilliance of the Old Covenant was that it set the stage for the New Covenant (NC). Without the OC we can't fully comprehend the purpose of the NC.

Fundamentally, the OC helps us understand the very nature of God. Our Creator is a Holy God, and in our present condition, we will never be able to live up to God's perfect standard. The OC informs us that we need another way, a different path, which can bridge the gap between ourselves and God. The OC teaches us that we cannot live a life that is perfect enough that we will be able to stand guiltless before God in heaven. If we break just one rule contained within the law, we will be judged guilty. God is a Holy God, and we are sinful man, and our actions separate us from God as far as one end of the universe is from the other.

So if we cannot get to God by following the rules, or by living our lives to a certain standard, then we need another path, and that path is Jesus. Jesus, as God's only Son, came down to earth, lived a perfect life, and willingly accepting the punishment that was meant for you and I. In doing so, Jesus created a bridge between us and God---IF we accept Jesus as our Savior. In effect, the OC points us to the cross, where Jesus sacrificed his life in exchange for ours.

Interestingly, there are a lot of different covenants recorded in the Bible. God had covenants with the nation of Israel, as well as with individual people. For some of the covenants he made a

promise that did not require anything in return (*unilateral* agreement). For others he exchanged a promise for a promise, meaning that if the people or person did a specific thing, then God would do something in particular for them in return (*bilateral* agreement).

God made covenants with Adam, Abraham, David, Isaac, Joshua, Solomon, and others. Covenants were a critical element of God managing his relationships with people. This is aptly demonstrated by the fact that the word “covenant” appears around 280 times in the Old Testament.

The process of putting the OC into place started with God giving Moses a couple of basic instructions. “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” (Ex 24:12). Although it’s a minor footnote to the story, it is interesting that the first time God prepared the OC agreement, he provided both the tablets and the writing that was on them. *The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.* (Ex 32:16).

So all Moses needed to do to ratify the agreement was to go up on the mountain, take possession of the tablets, carry them back down the mountain, and place them in the Ark of the Covenant. The OC was a “take it or leave it” arrangement, the people had already agreed to be bound by its terms, and by this point in the story there was no opportunity to negotiate or make a counter-offer. However, Moses did have one option available to him, and he smartly played that card at exactly the right moment. As the story unfolds, Moses destroyed the first set of tablets before he got back to camp, but in doing so saved a large number of Israelites from certain death.

The length of time that Moses was on the mountain was a factor. *Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.* (Ex 24:18). 40 days is a long time to be gone, and while he was away the people ran amok.

As an aside, the number 40 has special significance in the Bible. During the Flood, it rained 40 days and 40 nights. Israel wandered in the Desert 40 years. Goliath harassed Saul’s army 40 days before he was killed. Jesus was tempted 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. There are additional references to the number 40 in the Bible if we look for them.

In Moses’ case, the 40 days was long enough that the people lost track of why they were waiting for Moses at the base of the mountain. During the 40 days, they forgot who God was, and they forgot that they had consented to be bound by God’s OC arrangement.

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” (Ex 32:1).

In only 40 days, God's people, who had been first hand witnesses of countless miracles from God, were ready to move on. They had observed God's plagues in Egypt, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, and many other miracles in the desert, but they were ready to abandon God and go their own way.

As Moses was preparing to leave the mountain, he heard directly from God what was happening back at camp. [The LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves . . . They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it."](#) (Ex 32:7).

Undoubtedly, those were difficult words for Moses to hear, but they certainly gave him something to think about during his long walk back down the mountain. During his transit to camp, he came up with a plan, and when he got there, he put it into action.

[And as soon as \[Moses\] came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.](#) (Ex 32:19). Although it was a bold move, it was the most reasonable option Moses had available.

In order for a bilateral agreement to be binding on both parties, there first has to be an offer by one party, which must be followed by acceptance by the other party. In this case, when God provided Moses with the tablets, he made a bonafide offer. If Moses had placed the tablets in the Ark of the Covenant that would have constituted acceptance of the offer. By breaking the tablets Moses reject God's offer, and as a result, the OC did not go into effect. This was critically important, because if the OC had gone into effect, Israel would have immediately been guilty of breaking one of the covenant's most important requirements, ["You shall have no other gods before me."](#) (Ex 20:3).

Moses' quick actions prevented Israel from being guilty of breaking a major law in the Old Covenant, and perhaps they even saved the nation from being rejected as God's people. When Moses broke the tablets, was it sheer brilliance or divine inspiration? I can't say for certain, but it clearly demonstrates that Moses was more than just a pretty face with a staff.

After rejecting God's first offer, Israel was given another chance, but the second time around Moses was required to provide the stone tablets. [The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.](#) (Ex 34:1). After another journey up Mount Sinai, and after another 40 days, Moses brought the new tablets back to camp. With the new set, as soon as he arrived back in camp he placed the tablets inside the Ark, which finally sealed the deal.

The Old Covenant required Israel to follow a list of laws and regulations, and in turn God provided his presence, protection, and divine blessing. They were his people, and all was well with the world for a time. [And \[God\] said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. \(Ex 34:10\).](#) In the end, however, Israel failed to hold up to their end of the agreement. Individually and corporately, they sinned against God, broke his laws, and failed to deliver on their side of the agreement.

In spite of Israel's failures, God continued to stand by them as if his covenant was still in effect. Even after his people walked away from him many times, he still pursued them, renewed his relationship with them, and watched over them.

One of God's many fantastic attributes is that he is faithful, even when we are not. [If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. \(2 Tim 2:13\).](#) Faithfulness is in God's very nature. As the Old Covenant story demonstrates, at times, we might turn our back on God and reject him, but he will be waiting for us with open arms, beckoning us to return.

We all do wrong, and we are all in need of God's forgiveness and grace. Inasmuch as the fact that the OC was unable to provide these things in the long term, the New Covenant is a better agreement that offers so much more.

As we'll read in the next section, the New Covenant is a completely different agreement. Instead of being an agreement between God and a nation it is an agreement between God and individuals; instead of being limited to Israel it applies to anyone who desires to know God in a personal way; and instead of being based upon our actions, it is based upon the work that Christ did on our behalf when he went to the cross.

The New Covenant provides an agreement where we can fail and not be found guilty. In the New Covenant God's grace ensures our future, and it guarantees that we will have a place with him in heaven, where someday we will live with God our Creator forever and ever.

THE NEW COVENANT

There are several differences between the Old and New Covenants. While the Old Covenant was an agreement that bound God's people to a set of laws, the New Covenant is a covenant of grace and forgiveness. The Old Covenant called for continuous sacrifices to be made for sin, but under the New Covenant, there was one sacrifice for sin, for all of time. The Old Covenant applied to one particular group of people, but the New Covenant applies to anyone, and to everyone, who accepts Christ as their Savior.

There are multiple references in the New Testament about the NC. The writer of Hebrews stated [if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.](#) (Heb 8:7). And at the Last Supper Jesus talked about the NC when he said ["This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."](#) (Matt 26:28).

Even in the Old Testament there are references to the NC. More than 500 years before Christ was born, Jeremiah talked in detail about the New Covenant that was to come. ["The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."](#) (Jer 31:31-34).

We could almost end this section with the verses from Jeremiah. They tell the story of forgiveness and healing in man's relationship with God. They make the stone tablets unnecessary, because in the NC God writes his laws on our hearts and minds. The passage prophesies the arrival of a new agreement and in so doing, it helps us understand the transition from the old to the new.

In Corinthians, we are given an explanation that is even more comprehensive. [Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!](#) (2 Cor 3:7-9). Note that the phrase "ministry of the Spirit" is used in this passage. This gives us a glimpse into the idea that the Holy Spirit is fully participatory in the NC.

Where the Holy Spirit is the minister, Jesus is the mediator, or go between, in the NC. Christ's blood was poured out on our behalf, and his death on the cross was for our forgiveness. [How](#)

much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:14-15). Through these verses, we understand that the New Covenant delivers an “eternal inheritance.” This is great news. There was no promise of eternal life in the old, but there is in the new.

Under the old, sin reigned and dominated. Laws were given, which told the people what they could and could not do. By its very nature, the OC caused them to become more sensitive to sin. But for those of us who are under the NC, sin does not rule over us. *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.* (Rom 6:14). *We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.* (Rom 7:6).

Finally, a passage in Romans explains the connection between the old and the new, as well or better than any other set of verses in the New Testament. *Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 5:20-21). The law was given to show sin, but grace is more powerful, and by grace, through Christ, we can access eternal life.

We don't live, as I formerly believed, in a *sucking, swirling eddy of despair*. We live in God's grace. If we will only take hold of it, grab on, and not let go.

Nobody could be saved through the law. None, nada, zero, zilch, zip, squat. But all of us can be saved through grace, as long as we are willing to accept Christ as our Savior. Isn't that great news? We can all be saved through what Jesus did on the cross. The entire Bible, from cover to cover, points to just one thing, which is that salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Rom 8:1-2).

SEEKING GOD

When I was a brand new Christian, and when I still had that new car smell all over me, I was most attracted to the verses that related to seeking God. I think that it was natural at that point in my journey to look for those kind of themes. In my early Christian days, one of my favorite verses was when Jesus said, “[Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.](#)” (Matt 11:29).

Did you know that God is just waiting for us to invite him in? “[Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.](#)” (Rev 3:20).

I also really like a verse in James that tells us [draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.](#) (James 4:8). I’ve often heard it said that God is a gentleman. He does not force us to go to him or to be a part of his world. He lets us come if we want to, and if we don’t he lets us do that too, but if we do take a step in his direction he reciprocates and draws near to us. It’s comforting to know that he is always there for us when we need him.

When we finally do enter into a relationship with God, he gives us his assurance that he will stick closer to us than a brother. [For he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”](#) (Heb 13:5).

Peace I leave with you, (John 14:7).

SALVATION

So when I was first diagnosed with cancer and confronted the reality potentially dying I decided that I am a winner either way. As Paul said, [for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain](#). (Phil 1:21). I know. That's selfish, right? No, absolutely I would rather not leave, not yet anyway, but I also know it's out of my hands, and even when I was flying high performance fighter jets I always knew that I needed to have a back-up plan, in case I didn't come back from one of my flights. My back-up plan is what I'm going to talk about here, which is salvation.

Which brings up a good point, what is salvation, and why do we need to be saved? That's a really good question, and I think I'm going to let the Bible address that in the next several paragraphs, but the bottom line is that we all have done wrong, and none of us deserves to go to heaven on the basis of how good we are. Ultimately we are all selfish, self-centered people who have done things to hurt other people, and without God's grace, we would be destined for hell. It's not a pretty story.

When I was a waiter at Farrell's Ice Cream Parlor, there was another waiter there named Larry. We constantly had a running debate about sin. He kept telling me over and over again that he didn't need God, because he was basically good and did nothing wrong. Therefore, if there was a heaven, which he didn't admit that there was, then he was automatically going to get in because of superior moral living. I was never able to get any further than that with him, and that's where our discussion ended. I occasionally wonder what happened to him. He was a really good guy, but he wasn't perfect. On the basis of his actions he deserved hell, just like the rest of us. Unfortunately, I was never able to convince him of that. His self-righteousness got in the way.

The Bible tells quite a story about good and bad, right and wrong, and morality and immorality when it says that [we will all stand before God's judgment seat](#). (Rom 14:10). Ouch. Even Christians? Yes, even us. We will all be called in front of God someday, and only Jesus's death on the cross can save us. And, yes, even Larry needs saving.

Romans makes this idea crystal clear with a verse that says [for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God](#). (Rom 3:23). If we're all going to stand before God someday, and if all of us have sinned, then who can get into heaven?

Before I tell you the good news, let me pile on some more bad news. Jesus reminded us that many would fail to make it into heaven when he said, ["Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."](#) (Matt 7:13-14). This tells us that many people are not going to make it into heaven in the end.

Also, there's this one teeny little verse in Proverbs that is always rattling around in the back of my mind. [There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.](#) (Prov 14:12). This continuously reminds me of how easy it is to get off track and to go down a path that leads away from God. I've seen that happen to many people I love, friends who lose their way as they go off chasing things that are here on earth while the real prize is in heaven. Life is so short, and eternity is really REALLY long, but it's easy to lose sight of that fact.

The good news is that [the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.](#) (2 Pet 3:9). This tells us that God's desire is for as many people as possible to be saved, which is awesome, because God wants all of us to spend eternity with him in heaven. He wants us all on his team, and he is rooting for us.

The fact that Jesus willingly died for us is another indication of just how important we are to God. [For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.](#) (Rom 5:6). It's unimaginable that God's plan of salvation required his Son to die a horrible death on a cross, but that is the price of salvation, and God chose to pay it.

Everyone knows John 3:16. It is the ultimate verse to make this point. It says, [For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.](#) (John 3:16). The price for God was that his Son had to die. The price for us is only that we have to believe in God's Son and accept him as our Savior. Our salvation cost Jesus everything, and it cost us nothing. [For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.](#) (Rom 6:23).

ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED?

This is a topic that I've personally struggled with many times over the years. If someone prays to receive Christ as their personal savior, they are instantly saved. If that's true, then how can they fall out of favor and become un-saved.

There is so much at stake. We are talking about eternity. But if someone turns their back and walks away from God, how can he ignore that.

The Bible says [it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.](#) (Heb 9:27).

The Bible also tells us that [we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.](#) (2 Cor 5:10).

Romans states that [each of us will give an account of himself to God.](#) (Rom 14:12).

In our culture hell is almost never talked about. Why is that? It feels impolite to bring it up in conversation. However, unfortunately hell exists, and it is a place where many people are going to spend their eternity. Life is so short, and eternity is so long.

The Lord paints a bleak picture of hell in Matthew where he says that hell is a fire furnace, and ["In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."](#) (Matt 13:42).

So if there is so much at stake, how can a person commit himself or herself to Jesus, and then just walk away.

Several verses seem to support that it is impossible to fall out of favor with God. Jesus says, ["I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."](#) (John 10:28). Jesus also says, ["All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."](#) (John 6:37).

God alone, is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is impossible for us to look at any person and render a judgment on where they will spend eternity. Only God can truly know.

In light of the above, if a person is secure in Christ, and then they turn their back on him, can they lose their salvation?

Perhaps that's the wrong question to ask. Maybe the better question is: Is it possible to think that we are saved, when we are actually not saved?

This discussion makes me think about the Parable of the Sower, which is recorded in Matthew 13. Seed was sown in four different types of ground: Along the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. Many people will accept Jesus when given the chance, but just like the plants that die in the parable, their faith doesn't last, and it doesn't carry them across the finish line.

Jesus plainly warns us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 7:21). The rest of Matthew 7 goes on to say that, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matt 7:22-23).

The warning is clear. Many who believe they are Christians, and perhaps many who make a confession of faith, will find out on judgment day that they were wrong. This is downright scary. Especially in light of many people who have a façade of Christianity, but whose actions don't correspond. Again, it's not up to us to judge them. Only God can judge. We are commanded to love, and that's our mandate. That doesn't mean that we have to condone, but we do have to love. And sometimes that can really be a challenge.

One verse I really like has both a warning and a promise. "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Matt 10:32-33). When I think about that I try to focus on the positive side. Have I told someone about Jesus? Sometimes I don't think I'm doing nearly enough to let the un-saved know who Jesus is and how important he is to them, but when I do my future in eternity is secured.

In 1 Corinthians Paul uses a sports analogy to help us understand how important it is to live lives that are dedicated to God. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor 9:24-27). Even Paul, one of the most influential Christians of all time, was concerned with his faith and the possibility of being "disqualified." If Paul could be disqualified, how much more should I be concerned about my salvation? This tells me that any of us could fall out of God's grace.

We all do wrong things, and none of us is perfect, but I believe that the difference between someone who is saved and someone who is not is what they do afterwards. Fall down a thousand times, and get back up a thousand times, and you're still marching toward God.

PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

There are a lot of popular preachers who teach a prosperity-focused theology. They selectively focus on the verses in the Bible that seem to focus on prosperity, then they teach a faith-based get rich kind of theology. These preachers are easy to spot. Everything they have to say is focused on getting rich, getting healthy, or whatever. A large portion of their preaching is also about sending them money, which is usually tied to the financial blessing you should expect to receive.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” (Luke 12:22-23).

FAVORITE VERSES

I've covered many of these verses in the previous section, but here they are, all lined up in some type of order. When I was a young Christian I tried to memorize as many verses as I could. A lot of those verses are still back in the recesses of my brain today. I love that, and I wish I had memorized more.

GOD'S WORD

Proverbs 7:1-3

My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Psalm 12:7

The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

Psalm 19:7-8

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

1 Peter 1:24-25

The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

2 Peter 1:20-21

No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

John 8:31-32

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Psalm 119:9

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

Psalm 119:11

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:72

The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Psalm 119:80-90

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations.

Psalm 119:97-104

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my

mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 119:130

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

Psalm 119:160

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

Proverbs 4:20-22

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.

Romans 1:16

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Proverbs 30:5-6

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

Psalm 119:11-12

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes!

SIN

Romans 3:10-12

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 2:6-8

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Psalms 14:1

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

Hebrews 4:13

No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

James 4:17

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Psalms 53:1

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.

DEATH**Mark 8:36-37**

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man

give in return for his soul?

Psalm 90:10

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Psalm 73:27

For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.

Hebrews 9:27

It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.

JUDGEMENT

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'"

2 Corinthians 5:10

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Luke 12:8-9

"And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God."

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10

Those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints.

Matthew 13:49-50

So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jude 1:13

[For them] the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

Psalm 145:20

The LORD I preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

SEEKING GOD

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

John 8:12

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Isaiah 55:6

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

James 4:8

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

1 John 3:24

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.

Luke 11:9-10

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."

GRACE

Romans 5:20

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

John 10:10

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to

the riches of his grace.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need

FORGIVENESS

John 8:34, 36

"Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin [but] If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Hebrews 9:22

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Romans 5:8

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Psalms 101:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Psalms 148:8-9

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

FAITH

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we

stand.

Romans 10:17

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Galatians 3:11

The righteous shall live by faith.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and in that he rewards those who seek him.

2 Corinthians 4:18

We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Matthew 17:20

"For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

REPENTANCE

Psalms 51:10-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalm 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

RIGHTEOUSNESS**Matthew 5:6**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

John 12:46

"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."

Psalm 101:2-4

I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will I know nothing of evil.

Romans 13:14

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

SALVATION

1 John 4:9-10

God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Romans 5:8

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved a through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Philippians 2:12-13

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Galatians 2:16

A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 13:11

The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

Hebrews 7:25

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

1 John 4:15

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Matthew 10:32-33

"So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

Mark 8:34-35

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

John 1:12

To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 5:24

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

John 14:6

"I am I the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 17:3

"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

1 John 5:11-12

God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Romans 10:9-10

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

CHRISTIAN DEATH

Psalm 116:15

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

John 6:51

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."

Psalm 73:23-24, 26

I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

John 11:25-26

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

John 14:2-3

"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

RESURRECTION

2 Corinthians 4:14 He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

PRAYER

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

James 5:16

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

1 John 5:14-15

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Matthew 7:7-8

"Ask, and it will be given to you; a seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."

Matthew 7:11

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Matthew 18:19-20

"If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Matthew 21:22

"Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Mark 11:24

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

John 14:13-14

"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

John 15:7

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

John 16:23-24

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Psalms 32:6

Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.

LOVE

Romans 12:9

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Ephesians 5:2

Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

1 Peter 4:8

Keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

1 John 3:16

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

1 John 3:23

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:12

If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 3:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

Psalm 32:10

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

NO FEAR**Deuteronomy 31:6**

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

Matthew 10:28

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Psalm 34:4

I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 John 4:4

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Matthew 6:27

"And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

John 14:27

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

John 16:33

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Psalm 4:8

In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 121:7-8

The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.

Romans 8:31

If God is for us, who can be against us?

CHRISTIAN LIVING

2 Corinthians 5:17

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 13:14

Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Romans 8:5

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Psalms 37:4

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

James 1:19-20

Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Ephesians 4:31

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Galatians 5:21

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 6:9

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

1 Thessalonians 2:12

Walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Psalms 119:37

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.

GOD'S BLESSINGS

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Ephesians 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

2 Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Peter 1:4

He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

1 John 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.

Matthew 6:33

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Psalms 86:8-10

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Psalms 145:15-17

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all

his works.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

THANKFULNESS

Hebrews 13:15

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Psalms 50:14

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Psalms 145:10

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!

Psalms 147:7-11

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre! He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

WORSHIP

John 4:23-24

“True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Hebrews 12:28-29

Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Psalm 29:2

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

Psalm 66:1-3

Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!"

Psalm 68:4

Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him!

Psalm 84:4

Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

Psalm 95:1-2

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalm 99:9

Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!

Psalm 113:3

From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised!

HUMILITY

Romans 12:3

I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think

Mark 10:43-44

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

1 Peter 5:5

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Matthew 7:1-2

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."

Matthew 23:12

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 17: 10

"When you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Luke 18:14

"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

WISDOM

Psalm 90:12

Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 111:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Proverbs 3:7-8

Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Proverbs 3:13-15

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Proverbs 8:10-11

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

Proverbs 9:10-11

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.

GOD'S CREATION

Romans 1:20

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are

without excuse.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Psalm 19:1-4

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 33:6

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

Psalm 74:16-17

Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

Psalm 147:4-5

He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

Psalm 95:4-5

In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Psalm 139:9-10

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

MARRIAGE

Mark 10:6

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Hebrews 13:4

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Luke 16:18

"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

Proverbs 5:15

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

Proverbs 5:18-19

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

Proverbs 12:4

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband.

Proverbs 18:22

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 31:10-31

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than v jewels. 11[†] The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13[†] She w seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. 14[†] She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. 15[†] She x rises while it is yet night and y provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. 16[†] She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. 17[†] She z dresses herself [5] with strength and makes her arms strong. 18[†] She perceives that her merchandise is

profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. 19[†] She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. 20[†] She a opens her hand to b the poor and reaches out her hands to b the needy. 21[†] She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in c scarlet. [6] 22[†] She makes d bed coverings for herself; her clothing is e fine linen and f purple. 23[†] Her husband is known in g the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. 24[†] She makes h linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. 25[†] i Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. 26[†] She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27[†] She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28[†] Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 29[†] "Many j women have done k excellently, but you surpass them all." 30[†] l Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. 31[†] Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

MONEY AND WEALTH

1 Timothy 6:7-8

Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

1 John 3:17

If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

1 Timothy 6:9

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life a free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Luke 12:15

"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the

abundance of his possessions.”

1 Timothy 6:17

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Luke 16:13

"No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Luke 6:38

"Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Psalms 34:8-9

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

Psalms 37:16

Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked.

Psalms 37:25

I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.

Proverbs 3:9-10

Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Proverbs 6:9-11

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

Proverbs 10:4

A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Proverbs 11:24

One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Proverbs 13:11

Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

Proverbs 13:22

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

Proverbs 15:16

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.

Proverbs 21:17

Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

Proverbs 24:33-34

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

Proverbs 28:6

Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways.

Proverbs 30:8-9

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.

Ecclesiastes 5:12

Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20

Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

THE TONGUE**James 3:2**

If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

James 3:6-10

The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every

kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

2 Timothy 2:16

Avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.

1 Peter 3:10

For Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.

Luke 6:45

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Matthew 12:36-37

"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Psalms 141:3

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!

Proverbs 17:28

Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

Ecclesiastes 9:17

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

Ecclesiastes 10:12

The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

Proverbs 3:27

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Proverbs 6:16-19

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Proverbs 11:22

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

Proverbs 13:24

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Proverbs 16:7

When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Proverbs 16:9

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:25

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Proverbs 19:21

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Proverbs 20:5

The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.

Proverbs 20:13

Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.

Proverbs 21:2

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.

Proverbs 21:9

It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

Proverbs 21:19

It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 23:31-32

Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.

Proverbs 24:16

For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.

Proverbs 25:17

Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about **tomorrow**, for you do not know what a day may bring.

Proverbs 27:2

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Proverbs 28:19

Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

Proverbs 29:17

Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

Ecclesiastes 9:10

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

Ecclesiastes 10:2

A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

OTHER FAVORITE VERSES**Philippians 4:13**

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 1:6

He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Mark 4:25

"For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Psalm 37:4-5

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.

Psalm 37:23-24

The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD I upholds his hand.

Psalm 44:6-8

For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever.

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

Psalm 59:16-17

But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

Psalm 71:19

Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?

Psalm 84:10

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Psalm 127:3-5

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!

Psalm 139:13-14

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalm 139:17-18

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

Romans 8:38-39

Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

SALVATION

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Cor 15:21-22).

THE WORD

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16).

CREATION

For by him all things were created, I in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (Col 1:16).

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:3).

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb 1:2).

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Heb 11:3).

[God] gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom 4:17).

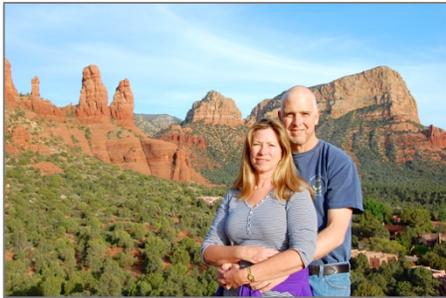
FEAR

I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. (Ps 34:4).

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE PICTURES

Like most people, I love pictures. These are just a few of my favorites. If you get the impression that Susie, Jennifer, and Jordan are really important, you are right. They are the center of my universe!







FAVORITE RECIPES

Yeah. Let's see . . . Ummm, so how do I say this? Ok, so I'm not great cook, nor do I claim to be. There. Just between you and me, maybe can this be my one and only confession of inadequacy in my entire life? Thanks. Just kidding, but even though I am not an amazing cook, I am a great eater. So you've noticed? Additionally, I know what I like to eat, and that has to count for something! That's what this section is all about, good stuff to eat. If you're a foodie, all the better.

My favorite foods on the planet are all comfort foods, and most of the recipes in here fall squarely into that category. Comfort food is highly underrated by the way, allegedly because it is so bad for us, as if!!! But chocolate milkshakes and See's Candies are not all great for us, and I don't hear anyone talking bad about them. So if you're a foodie, like me, maybe you'll cut the comfort foods some slack and will spend a minute or two learning how to cook one or two of these recipes. Definitely try the Cream of Lettuce soup. It's uh-mazing!

BARBADOS MAC PIE

One Christmas Susie and I rented a house in Barbados, and we had the opportunity to spend some time with our maid, who just happened to grow up on the island. One night that we were there we paid her a little extra to cook an amazing dinner for us, and I wrote down every ingredient and step of the Mac Pie she made. Here it is, as best as I was able to replicate it with the ingredients that are available in our stores.

Ingredients

- 20 oz macaroni (preferably long tubes – penne pasta or the like)
- ½ cube of butter or margarine
- 30-40 oz sharp cheddar cheese, grated
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk (can substitute with some half and half if desired)
- 3 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoon garlic
- 2 teaspoons white pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Optional

- 4 Pre-cooked sausage or 2 cans of tuna
- Tomato ketchup – enough to change color
- Small pinch of curry powder or other spices for flavor

Garnish

- 4 tablespoons fine breadcrumbs
- 4 teaspoons butter
- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese
- 6 tablespoons grated parmesan

Directions

1. Bring water to the boil and add the broken up macaroni or macaroni elbows and salt. Boil it uncovered until it is just tender but not overcooked (about 8 minutes).
2. Preheat a moderately hot oven 350F.
3. Drain the macaroni thoroughly, put it back into the same hot saucepan it was cooked in and mix in the butter.
4. Add two-thirds of the cheese and mix it in with the macaroni a bit at a time, while it is still warm.
5. Whisk the egg until fluffy and add the milk, onion powder, white pepper, salt, pepper, and other spices. Stir mixture into the macaroni and mix.
6. Spoon mix into a greased oven-proof casserole dish. Top with the Garnish. Bake in the center of the oven for about 30-40 minutes depending on the depth of the dish.

CLAM CLAM CHOW CHOW

I know. The name is stupid. But that's what I call it. If you get the seasonings just right this recipe will beat EVERY restaurant version of clam chowder that you've ever had. Ever! Ok, I might be stretching it a bit on that one, but truthfully, there is only one restaurant I've ever been to that has better clam chowder, and it was in Seattle, and that's a long ways to go to get chowder that's better than this.

Ingredients

- 7 small cans of baby clams (set juice aside to be used along with other clam juice)
- 1 eight-ounce bottle of clam juice, or as needed
- 8 slices bacon, about half of the fat trimmed off, minced
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 5 large cloves of garlic, minced
- 4 stalks of celery, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 3 tablespoons thyme
- 3 bay leaves
- 1/2 cup flour
- 2 large potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 quart half and half, or as desired
- 6-7 tablespoons dry sherry (just enough that you can barely tell its there)

- 3/4 stick butter
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste (lots of pepper !)
- 3 shakes of Tabasco, 2-3 shakes of Worcestershire sauce
- Other seasonings, as needed (a few shakes of Old Bay Seasonings if needed, but only if it needs salt—careful ! this is pretty salty, as is)

Directions

1. Cook the bacon slowly in a soup pot over medium heat until lightly crisp, about 7 to 10 minutes.
2. Add the garlic, onion, carrot, and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables soften.
3. Add the thyme.
4. Add the bottle of clam juice to the bacon and vegetables, and stir in half the flour.
5. Add the rest of the clam juice (from the canned clams), and set the clams aside in the refrigerator to keep until you're ready to add them at the end.
6. Add the potatoes, tabasco, and Worcestershire, bring to a boil, then simmer for 15-20 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Thicker pieces of potato will take longer, but smaller diced pieces will cook quicker.
7. Slowly stir the rest of the flour in as the mixture is cooking. Use a whisk to make sure the flour doesn't clump.
8. After the potatoes have thoroughly cooked, add the half-and-half, clams, sherry and butter and simmer for an additional 5 -10 minutes.
9. Season to taste with additional pepper, Tabasco, Worcestershire, butter and thyme.
10. Serve in heated bowls with garlic bread on the side.

CREAM OF LETTUCE SOUP



Before you wrinkle your nose and say that this recipe doesn't make sense, let me tell you that this soup is all about the texture and the cream, butter, and pepper, but the texture really makes it amazing. Rick helped me a LOT with this recipe---and with all the recipes in here---but this is one of my favorites, and I consider it my signature dish. While I'd like to take credit for coming up with this recipe, smarter people than me figured it out. Although I've made cream of lettuce a ton of

times, I probably don't have the seasonings measured out here just perfect in the ingredients below. Keep that in mind as you make it. Personally I keep doing a taste test at the end until I get it just right. You may have to play around with the pepper a bit, and hold off on the salt until you are sure it's needed, in order to get this one perfect. The goal is to not taste any one thing more than any other except for the pepper, which should definitely stick out slightly over the top.

Ingredients

- 1 stick butter
- 5 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 cup water
- 2 large heads of lettuce, cored and shredded
- 3 teaspoons fresh ground black pepper
- 3 cans chicken broth (14.5 oz cans)
- Half a quart of half-and-half (16 oz), or as desired
- ½ cup flour
- 2 teaspoons garlic salt
- 2-3 shakes tabasco

Directions

1. Place the garlic and ½ stick butter in a large soup pot and sautee. After the garlic is slightly cooked, add the water, then the lettuce into the pot.
2. Simmer the mixture over low heat, stirring constantly until all the lettuce is limp. The idea is to just barely take the crispiness out of the lettuce, not to wilt the lettuce into the consistency of spinach. Add fresh ground pepper as you stir.
3. When done, take the soup pot off the heat, and set it aside for the next phase.
4. Place 1/5 of mixture in a blender with 1/5 of the chicken broth. Blend, adding flour and half-and-half as you go. Blend long enough to chop up the lettuce, but not so long that it gets really smooth. Leave some texture (but not chunks) as you go.
5. Transfer the contents from the blender into a clean large pot. Heat over medium heat until the soup starts to boil, then reduce the heat to low.
6. Simmer for 25 minutes, stirring frequently to ensure the soup does not burn onto the bottom of the pot.
7. At the very end add the remaining ½ stick of butter and any remaining half-and-half, to suit your taste.
8. Taste test the soup, and add additional pepper and garlic salt if needed. Warning: the chicken broth is already a little salty, so be judicious with the salt
9. Serve in a warmed bowl with warm sourdough bread and butter on the side.

SHRIMP BISQUE

The original purpose of this recipe was to come up with a quick way to make one of my favorite soups ever invented. Most people love shrimp bisque. It's so amazing. Unlike the Clam

Chowder, this is not quite as good as you can get in a good seafood restaurant, but it is a lot easier to make. This soup goes together quickly, and is really tasty with some stinky sourdough bread.

Ingredients

- 32 oz Seafood Stock broth
- 2 garlic cloves - finely diced
- 2 six oz cans tomato paste
- 1 large ripe tomato, chopped up
- 1 tsp white pepper
- 2 tbsp basil
- 2 tbsp thyme
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 shake tabasco
- 1 small shake Worcestershire
- Very sparing shake of garlic salt or Old Bay (add more at the very end, if needed)
- 1 quart half and half
- 14 oz bag cooked bay shrimp (cut shrimp into smaller pieces)

Directions

1. Combine broth and chopped garlic into a large pot
2. As mixture begins to get hot stir in the tomato paste
3. Add chopped tomato
4. Stir in spices
5. Bring to a boil then reduce the heat
6. Add half and half
7. Bring back up to a simmer and very lightly simmer for three minutes
8. Add cooked chopped up shrimp
9. Bring back up to a simmer then turn heat off
10. Let soup rest for 30 or more minutes, then heat back up and serve

BUFFALO CHICKEN DIP

Thanks so much to Julee Cheever for introducing us to this one, the Buffalo Chicken Dip recipe is one of the yummiest and easiest to make home made appetizers we've ever seen. Lots of chicken and cheese, with the hint of blue cheese makes this perfect for either appetizer or meal. I promise, you are going to love this!

Ingredients

- Two packages of cream cheese (8 oz each)
- 1 cup ranch dressing
- 1/2 cup Texas Pete's Buffalo Wing Sauce
- 1 pre-cooked chicken from supermarket (28 oz)
- 8 oz bag shredded cheese (cook's choice)
- Few shakes of parmesan on top
- Scallions for garnish
- Blue cheese crumbles on top (optional)
- Corn chips or tortilla chips to dip with



Directions

1. Squeeze cream cheese into mixing bowl. Warm in microwave for one to two minutes stirring and mixing as you go.
2. Add ranch dressing, hot sauce, and most of the cheese. Mix thoroughly. Use whisk to mix, if lumpy.
3. Shred pre-cooked chicken into bowl, and mix.
4. Add mixture to small casserole dish.
5. Sprinkle remaining cheese over top. Lightly dust with parmesan cheese.
6. Cook in oven, covered with foil, for 30 minutes.
7. Garnish with diced scallions and blue cheese crumbles if desired.

NEIL'S RED CURRY CHICKEN

Sometime when I got into my early 50s I finally figured out that I REALLY LOVE Thai Curry Chicken. After doing some research on the internet, and after several not-so-great attempts I finally came up with this version. Like most recipes, the secret in this one is being able to combine all the ingredients in such a way that no single ingredient (other than the curry) pokes

its head up above the rest. The fresh and healthy ingredients are what makes this a truly spectacular dish. Although it doesn't quite fit my perfect definition of "comfort food," it's way too healthy for that, it is still one of my favorites so it has to be included in this list. I apologize for including my name in the title, and I know I don't have the patent on chicken curry, but this recipe took so many tries and experiments that I feel like I own it now.



RECOMMEND TO BUY THE "GOOD INGREDIENTS" AT THE ORIENTAL MARKET---OR THIS WONT TASTE NEARLY AS YUMMY!!!

Curry Sauce + Chicken Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp Oil
- 2 Tbsps Red Curry (use less if you want mild) - Mae Ploy brand works well
- 2 Half Inch Slices of a Yellow Onion - medium finely chopped
- 1/2 Cup Coconut Milk - Arroy-D brand is yummy
- 1/2 Cup Water
- Small Package of Chicken - sliced into strips

Vegetables Ingredients:

- 2 to 3 Red and Green Bell Peppers - sliced into 2 inch by 1/4 inch slices
- Handful Thinly Sliced Bamboo Shoots
- 3 to 4 Thai Lime Leaves
- 1/2 Cup Coconut Milk
- 1/2 Cup Water
- Handful Cilantro Leaves - separate from stalks and each other
- Handful Thai Basil Leaves - very coarse chop (basically them cut in half)
- 1 Tbsp Thai Fish Sauce



- 1 Tbsp Brown Sugar
- Ground Pepper to Taste

Directions:

1. Heat oil in deep skillet. Add red curry and onion. Cook until onion is partially cooked.
2. Add coconut milk, water, and chicken and cook on medium high heat until chicken is mostly cooked
3. Add bell peppers, bamboo shoots, lime leaves, coconut milk, and water to deep, bring to a boil, and cook until veggies are slightly tender.
4. Add cilantro, basil leaves, and seasonings (to taste), cook for a couple of minutes and remove from heat.
5. Serve over Jasmine Rice

CHICKEN ZUCCHINI CASSEROLE

Who doesn't like casserole? I could live most of my life eating out of a casserole dish, and I would be completely happy, and this is one of those recipes that truly makes me happy.

Ingredients

- 1 (2 1/2 to 3 lb.) broiler-fryer chicken, cut up
- 6 c. sliced zucchini
- 1/4 c. chopped onion
- 2 tbsp. water
- 1 (8 oz.) carton commercial sour cream
- 1 (10 3/4 oz.) can cream of chicken soup, undiluted
- 1 c. grated carrots
- 1 (8 oz.) pkg herb-seasoned stuffing mix
- 1/2 c. butter, melted

Directions

1. Wash and dry chicken parts. Place in flat microwave baking dish. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave at high 8 to 9 minutes. Rearrange chicken pieces, if necessary. Cover and microwave at high 8 to 10 minutes. When cool, remove meat from bones and cut into small pieces.
2. Combine zucchini, onion, and water in a 2-quart microwave casserole. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on high 5 to 7 minutes. Let stand, covered. Drain, if necessary.
3. Combine sour cream and soup in a bowl. Add carrots, chicken, and cooked vegetables.
4. Combine stuffing and melted butter. Divide half the stuffing mix between two 8- inch baking dishes. Spread half of the chicken mixture over stuffing in each dish. Top each with remaining stuffing mix. Microwave at high 10 to 12 minutes or until heated through.

Let stand, covered with waxed paper, 2 to 3 minutes before serving. Yield: 8 to 12 servings.

NOTE: This can also be prepared in a 9x13 inch dish for 8-12 servings. For 6 servings, wrap, label, and freeze one 8-inch casserole for use later.

TUNA CASSEROLE

I don't know why, but for some reason I grew up thinking that tuna casserole was one of the greatest home made meals that anyone could ever invent. I just recently rediscovered this one and started making it in my favorite kitchen utensil, the casserole dish.

Ingredients

- 1 (12 ounce) package egg noodles
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1/4 cup chopped celery
- 4 garlic cloves (minced)
- 2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup frozen green peas
- 2 (6 ounce) cans tuna, drained
- 2 (10.75 ounce) cans condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 (4.5 ounce) can sliced mushrooms
- 1 cup crushed potato chips

Directions

1. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook pasta in boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes, or until al dente; drain.
2. Preheat oven to 425 degrees F (220 degrees C).
3. In a large bowl, thoroughly mix noodles, onion, 1 cup cheese, peas, tuna, soup and mushrooms.
4. Transfer to a 9x13 inch baking dish, and top with potato chip crumbs and remaining 1 cup cheese.
5. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes in the preheated oven, or until cheese is bubbly.

CHIPOTLE CHICKEN

There's a Mexican restaurant in Hanford that makes the best chipotle chicken I've ever had. It is SO yummy! I experimented several times with this recipe, and I never felt that I quite owned it, like some of the other recipes here. I'm including it here, because even though it's not as good as the one at the restaurant, it still tastes pretty darn good.

Ingredients

- 4 cooked sausages + small bag cooked chicken
- ½ medium sized thingy of sour cream
- ½ to ¾ small carton half-and-half
- ½ pablano pepper (chopped)
- ¼ red onion (diced)
- 1 green bell pepper (sliced)
- 1 orange bell pepper (sliced)
- 2 small tomatoes
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 3 chipotle peppers from small can
- Juice from 1 lemon and 2 limes
- ½ bush of cilantro
- ½ tsp chipotle chili
- ½ tsp pepper
- Salt to taste
- Flour as needed to thicken
- ½ of a \$5.00 block of med cheddar

Directions

1. Combine pablano pepper, onion, bell peppers, tomato garlic lemon and lime juice in a pan with some cooking oil, and sauté. Cook harder ingredients first and add softer ingredients toward end.
2. Blend 2/3 of mixture above with half and half to a puree.
3. Return mixture to stove and add back together in deeper pan. Simmer for 20 minutes and add flour to thicken.
4. Mix in sour cream and cheese at the end. Do not overcook with these ingredients.
5. Brown chicken and sausage in a pan, and add to the sauce.
6. Serve with tortillas or over corn chips.

BLACK EYED PEAS

My grandma used to make black eyed peas every year for New Years Day. She used to say something about having good luck for the whole year if you had black eyed peas that day. So with a little help I came up with this recipe. Even though I don't make it very often, it still counts as comfort food.

Ingredients

- 2 medium onions, chopped
- One 1-pound link andouille or kielbasa sausage, sliced in half lengthwise and cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices (about 3 1/2 cups)
- 1 cup chopped yellow onions
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne
- 4 cloves garlic peeled
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme
- 4 bay leaves
- 3 teaspoons finely chopped fresh parsley leaves
- 8 cups Chicken Stock
- 1 pound dried black-eyed peas, rinsed, sorter over, soaked overnight in water to cover and drained
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic

Directions

1. Brown the sausage in a large saucepan over medium heat.
2. Add the onions, salt, cayenne, garlic cloves, thyme, bay leaves and parsley.
3. Cook, stirring, until the onions are wilted, about 5 minutes..
4. Add the stock, peas, and garlic.
5. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, until the peas are tender, about 1 1/2 hours.
6. Remove the bay leaves and serve warm.

FAVORITE FLYING STORIES

Over the past many years I've noticed that whenever a group of fighter pilots get together (current or former aviators) the conversations always go the same way: They start with some kind of review of career paths, then they move to places stationed, and then to aircraft flown, and then after that the conversations always degrade down into a discussion of the crashes that the pilots have either know about or been associated with. I don't know why, but for some reason the crashes are always the biggest part of the conversation. Maybe because they affected us more than just about anything else we did.

The loss of a jet in a squadron is a hugely traumatic experience for everybody assigned to the squadron. There are three simultaneous investigations that take place, the largest of which is a safety investigation that determines the causes of the mishap. The ultimate duty of the Mishap Board is to recommend new procedures (rules), which, if they had been in place before the mishap, they would have prevented the crash from occurring.

But don't some of the crashes occur solely due to random errors of below average pilots? Absolutely. In fact, most airplane crashes are due to pilot error, and often due to the errors of a below average aviator. However, none of that matters. New rules have to be added every time someone crashes a jet, regardless of who or why, because that's how the system works. The end result is that the process makes everyone conform to a set of unneeded procedures that may or may not save the worst pilots from themselves, but it makes everyone feel better, like we "did something."

Another weird rule is that an airplane crash can never be called a "crash." It has to be called a "mishap." Somehow that terminology is more palatable to the larger Navy organization than the word "crash," probably because it allows the Navy to de-personalize the event and to do a better job of organizing and categorizing the data. After all, a crash is never a crash. It is always a loss of equipment and/or people, which is money. In the end state the monetary loss is one of the major statistics that is tracked with the process.

VISIONS OF FLYING

From my earliest memories, I dreamed of flying. Not in an airplane or other mechanical device, but I visualized myself swooping through the air, arms sticking straight out, and directing my path whichever way I wished to go. I envisioned flying as a freedom that didn't exist for us earth-dwellers, firmly bound by the laws of gravity and unable to overcome its effects. I dreamed of a world where gravity existed, but I was free from its cruel bonds.

When I was in elementary school I would rush to the sliding glass door and watch it shake whenever a low boom passed through our neighborhood, which they did several times a month in those years. In the 1960's sonic booms were common near the Fresno Airport. The local Air National Guard was outfitted with supersonic fighter jets, and at least every couple of weeks we would hear one of them break the sound barrier. It was awesome. The sonic booms planted

small seeds inside my imagination, which eventually grew into an intense desire to become a fighter pilot. I grew up only a few miles from the airport that supported these amazing aircraft, and I marveled as I saw them rocket through the sky, and that is my first memories of wanting to do something so different and so cool that I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

During my fifth grade year my parents drove my sister and I to an airshow at Naval Air Station Lemoore. The Blue Angels were performing, flying their smoky and deafeningly loud F-4 Phantom jets. I was imprinted with the sight of them going through their maneuvers. I had no idea how cramped a cockpit would be or how tight and restricting flight gear was to wear. Nor did I imagine what it would be like to strap on an ejection seat on, and wear a jet like a suit of armor, but none of that mattered. The thought of being in the air, in control of a machine that cost more than I could make in two lifetimes, was too great to imagine. During college I nearly got sidetracked with a relationship and with dreams that were not my own, but in the end becoming a fighter pilot was what I wanted at the very core of my being.

12 years after watching the Blue Angels shred in their smoky F-4 Phantoms I applied to Naval Aviation Officer Candidate School. I knew the best pilots flew from the decks of aircraft carriers, and that's what I wanted to do. Even before the movie Topgun, the F-14 Tomcat was legendary to me. I had books on it. I had built models of it. The Tom-kitty epitomized cool.

I found the love of my life and was on track to get married in April 1985. Shortly after getting engaged to Susie the Navy called me with news of an opening to start officer's School in Pensacola. My start date was delayed long enough for us to have a very nice ceremony and a one-week honeymoon, and then I was off to Pensacola, FL to start Officer School. I was just hoping and dreaming that I would be good enough to make the cut to fly fighters.

After graduating Officer's School I completed undergraduate flight training in Florida and Texas. Earning my "wings of gold" in 1987, my dreams of becoming a fighter pilot were realized when I was selected to fly the F-14 at "Fightertown USA." Naval Air Station Miramar, in San Diego, was known as Fightertown, and it was the West Coast focal point for Navy fighters.

Following 10 months of initial Tomcat training I was assigned to VF-1 Wolfpack, a legendary squadron with roots back to 1943 and WW I. While assigned to VF-1, I flew more than 1,000 hours in the F-14 and made two overseas deployments. I was select to attend Topgun and flew dozens of missions over Iraq during Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Southern Watch. VF-1 was very good to me.

Every four years all Navy aircrew are required to complete physiological training. During our periodic training we discussed the potential of ejecting out of a disabled aircraft. The pilots and Radar Intercept Officers (RIO's) who had previously ejected were local heroes of a sort. The young guys in my squadron knew most of their names and at least a portion of their stories.

Discussing ejection scenarios was a routine part of every brief for every flight. The designated “briefer” would run through a series of possible scenarios, and we all seemed to know that we would do if and when we faced the decision to “punch out.” Every guy had particular nuances regarding his criteria for pulling the yellow and black handle, and the fine points involved in the decision were endlessly debated. Ejection criteria were basically a personal decision, arrived at only after much consideration. In most scenarios it was generally accepted that the Radar Intercept Officer (RIO) had the responsibility for pulling the ejection handle, while the pilot would continue to fly the aircraft and attempt to keep the jet upright, which if you’re low, being right side up makes a lot of sense.

We often talked about the guys who didn’t eject, wondering what made them stay with a doomed aircraft past the point of no return. What were they thinking about? Did the situation deteriorate too fast, and they didn’t have time to get out? Were they incapacitated or disoriented? Did they realize that they were just about to crash, or maybe they didn’t know it? Or, perhaps they had a terminal case of optimism and hoped they could save an unsalvageable jet. Regardless, the ones who didn’t eject and just “rode it in” always perplexed us.

But in the relative comfort and safety of our air-conditioned Ready Room we eloquently orated on our personal willingness to make an instantaneous decision to abandon a \$36 million fighter without a whim of regret or remorse. Although everyone had their own criteria “getting out,” very few of the folks who ejected faced a scenario that they had previously imagined. In most cases, ejecting was more difficult, traumatic, and disorienting than any aircrew could imagine it to be.



Naval Aviators get hundreds of dollars a month more than their ship-driving, counterparts. The extra pay they receive is termed “flight pay,” which basically amounts to hazardous-duty compensation. Aviators get paid to make decisions during rapidly developing scenarios, for which prepackaged and predetermined responses do not already exist. They live in a high stakes world where some of their decisions involve life and death, both for themselves and for people on the ground beneath them. They are not super-humans, but they are expected to perform while under super-human conditions.

During my tour with VF-1 Wolfpack, we deployed overseas twice aboard the Ranger. We carried the American flag wherever we went, often intercepting and escorting Soviet aircraft, whose mission was to find and over-fly the aircraft carrier. It was the Cold War, and we were involved in a high stakes cat and mouse game. It was the sport of kings.

Just before Desert Storm we were the third carrier to ever steam in the Persian Gulf, and we arrived just in time to be there for the start of the war. We flew combat missions, got shot at, rendezvoused on Air Force Tankers, navigated unfamiliar areas on pitch-black nights, flew missions in the worst possible weather, and always came back to the ship and landed on the moving deck of the smallest aircraft carrier I was ever stationed on. But in my three years as a pilot at VF-1, we didn't lose a single aircraft or aircrew. We were blessed, we were invincible, and we could do no wrong.

A DUBIOUS HISTORY

So I had this instructor in one of my first training squadrons, way back in the mid-1980s, and he told me several times that if I was going to crash our airplane and kill him in the process, the least I could do was have the decency to crash somewhere away from the field where nobody else could watch it happen. Besides being a bizarre request I didn't understand what he was talking about until much later, after I had been in the Navy for several years. By then I figured out that if you happened to crash in front of other people, they would be talking about you forever, and not in a good way. In some ways it was a valuable lesson. In other ways it was a waste, because it never addressed the burning issue, which was how to avoid crashing in the first place. I don't know why he never addressed that. Or maybe he did, but I just didn't notice.

Page forward several years, and after my time in VF-1 Wolfpack I had the dubious honor of being in two squadrons that lost a combined total of eight jets in just four years. Even during that danger-fraught period of Naval Aviation, that was a lot of investigation boards and memorial services. It was way more than average. That period of time left an indelible impression on me, and in many ways it affected the remainder of my time as an aviator. It still affects me today--- especially on Memorial Day when I quietly remember a few of the great friends that I lost.

In the early 1990s I joined VF-126 Bandits. Starting about a year after I got there we lost four jets in quick succession. The XO of the squadron punched out of an ailing A-4 Skyhawk when it lost its only engine due to an oil pressure malfunction. A few months later two guys punched out of an A-4 after they lost the motor and were unable to restart it due to an improper setting on one of the electrical switches in the cockpit. Clear pilot error was involved in that crash. Not long after that we lost an amazing icon of Naval Aviation, "Bug" Roach, after he had an oil problem in his Skyhawk and his engine burned up. He ejected out of the aircraft and would have probably survived except for two failures in his ejection seat. Finally, on a cold morning in December 1992 "Jimbo" Boyle hit the frozen ground at more than 500 knots, shortly after launching out of Twin Falls, ID. I was on the Mishap Board for that one and went up to Idaho to help pick up the pieces and do an investigation.

After I was in VF-126 I was assigned back to Tomcats and was sent to the worst squadron at Miramar for more than a decade running. VF-213 was known to be below average, and rumor had it that at one time they had single-handedly crashed 25% of all the Tomcats that had ever been crashed. I didn't know if that was true or not, but it sure seemed like it from what I knew about their history.

A few months after arriving in VF-213 we lost the first female Fighter Pilot ever killed in a fighter, when Kara Hultgreen died while ejecting from her Tomcat. She was my wingman, and I'll tell a story about her a few pages from now. I was on the Mishap Board that investigated her crash and probably know more than I should about the event.

Less than a year later "Sprout" Bates lost control of a jet during a training flight when he ham-fisted the controls and tumbled out of control during a benign maneuver. He dorked away the recovery too, and that resulted in the jet going into a flat spin, which was difficult if not impossible to recover from. Sprout's RIO punched him and Sprout out, saving both of their lives.

About four months later I crashed a jet after it did a Space Shuttle Challenger imitation while we were doing Mach 1 at only 800 feet above the water. That story is in here.

Finally, maybe eight or nine months later Sprout killed himself and his RIO, "HOB" Higgins, during a routine launch out of Nashville, TN. He was showing off for his parents and pulled up into a steep climb after taking off, then he got too slow, then he stalled his Tomcat, and after that he was unable to recover. HOB, who was in his backseat, and who rode the jet into the ground with him, was one of my best friends in the squadron. It ripped a piece out of my heart to lose him.

After my tour in VF-213 ended, I was assigned to train in the F/A-18 at VFA-125, at NAS Lemoore. It was 1996, and that's when Susie and I moved the family up to Hanford. I don't remember losing any jets on my short stint with VFA-125, but they were so impressed with my experience as an investigator on two different mishaps that they sent me to a place that no aviator wants to go . . . Safety School.

The whole point of Safety School is to learn how to investigate aircraft crashes, which I already knew how to do, thanks to Jimbo's and Kara's mishaps. You can imagine my surprise when I showed up for the school, in Monterey, and they assigned me what room? Room number 213. No kidding. When I saw 213 on the door I was really dreading being there. Six weeks of duty that didn't involve flying, and I was staying in a room that had the same number on it as the Tomcat squadron I was trying to get away from. It was a poignant moment.

The story gets better. I went into my room, tossed my bag on the bed, and stepped into the bathroom to splash a little water on my face. As I turned on the hot water knob on the sink, the

knob shot off and landed half way across the room, and immediately a high-pressure geyser of hot water was shooting up to the ceiling, and began filling my bathroom with steamy water. I tossed a towel on the floor next to the door, shut the bathroom door, and trotted down to the front desk to ask for help. The girl at the desk said it would be a couple of hours before she could get someone there to fix it, but when I pointed out the place on the ceiling of the lobby where water was starting to drip through, she somehow found someone who was able to fix the problem immediately. Funny how that works. As long as the problem only affected me, it was going to take a while to get the maintenance guy up there, but as soon as the problem entered her world, the repairman was instantly available.

The rest of Safety School went much better, but having the Safety Officer qualification resulted in me being assigned to start my next tour as the Safety Department Head. I was in VFA-97 Warhawks at that time, and being Safety O meant, among other things, I was responsible for all the safety reports, including the mishap reports. I felt I had done my time and paid my dues in investigating two mishaps, something most aviators never have to do, but after Safety School I got to investigate three more crashes. Not fun.

In the Warhawks we lost a jet due to an inflight fire. Fortunately, the pilot was able to land, but by the time he got back on the ground the back half of the jet had been burned beyond repair. The mishap report on that one wasn't that fun to write, and it took a lot of investigation to get it done right, but the good news is that we didn't lose a precious friend and squadron mate in that event.

After the Warhawks I was assigned to VFA-125, where we lost a T-34 due to a landing mishap. The pilot failed to do a required procedure prior to takeoff, and he lost all electrical power shortly into the flight. Due to a compounding series of errors, his landing gear collapsed on the runway, and he did major damage to the propeller, engine, and underbelly. I investigated and co-authored the 30-something page report of that crash.

A year later we lost another T-34 at VFA-125 when two guys crashed into the ground shortly after they hit a low hanging power wire in a narrow canyon. It was awful going to the memorial service knowing that a good pilot killed himself and his back-seater, solely due to hot-dogging in a canyon that he shouldn't have been flying in. I was involved in some of the administrative events that follow that type of crash, but thankfully my Skipper kept me off the Mishap Board.

In my last tour I joined VFA-147 as the executive officer. A Tomcat crashed into the ocean after losing the back half of his tailhook during a landing. Because I had flown F-14s in my past, I was assigned as the Senior Member of the Mishap Board. I unashamedly tried to get out of it but couldn't. The story is very interesting to me. It was the most technical investigation I was a part of, and it was challenging to get the information out of some folks who didn't want me to know the whole story.

Several months later I was leading a young Junior Officer around on a training flight when he departed controlled flight and tumbled out of control down toward the water. He ejected at 2,000 feet and lived, however the jet did not fare so well. He was a below average aviator, and because of that he never flew again. Naval Aviation didn't trust him to take another expensive, high-performance fighter jet out on a joy ride. He just wasn't cut out for it.

The point of all of these stories is that, in one form or another, I've been involved in a LOT of airplane crashes. I would have been much happier to not have all those experiences, but since I did I'm going to tell some of the stories.

So that's what this section is all about, mostly about the crashes that I witnessed, was a part of, cleaned up, or had some sort of connection to. I wrote a lot of these stories back in the day, shortly after they happened, and I'm going to leave my original words mostly intact with only minor grammatical edits. Maybe it will be interesting that way, because the stories will be in the Navy voice that I used to use, a long long time ago.

I decided that I would put this section in the very back of the book, because I realize that not everyone cares about flying stories, and a lot of people really don't care about the crashes. If you quit reading already, or if you quit right here, I won't blame you.

But for those of you who decide to stick around, there are more than just crash stories in here, and I hope you find something interesting in what's in these pages.

SURFACE TO AIR MISSILES SOUTH OF BAGHDAD

During Desert Storm my wingman pilot's name was a young Lieutenant named "Ghost." He was an amazing guy, and I loved flying with him. Ghost taught me how to surf, and I passed to him my somewhat limited knowledge on the finer points of being an F-14 RIO. We made a good pair.

Ghost was thin and of average height, but he had the energy of a soccer player, and he had the strength of an ox. During our combat flights, Ghost and I saw plenty of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) launched in our direction, but none of it was aimed well. We generally flew above the AAA, and most of the SAMs we saw were unguided. Regardless, we generally avoided the SAMs by going around their locations, and it was rare that we were concerned by what we saw coming up off the ground.

Then, one stormy night in February 1991, Ghost and I had a bit more than just a scare. Our normal wingman, Eddie, was not flying with us that night. Instead we had "Bum" and "Cowboy" on our wing. We were patrolling an area just south of Baghdad and were on a combat air patrol (CAP) station known by the four-letter designator "Bong." Really, that was our CAP station's name. Except for a long line of thunderstorms over Iraq it was very quiet. Too quiet!

It was a beautiful night with a full moon and huge billowy storm clouds stretched across the horizon. Lightning danced through the clouds in a captivatingly erratic behavior, making the whole horizon temporarily light up. At times it was blinding, but most of the time it was just beautiful. At 25,000 feet above the ground we were cozy in our lazy Tomcat, flying a long racetrack pattern on a north-south orientation, hoping for the Iraqi MiG to come play that we knew would never launch. Then something happened that I will never forget.

All of a sudden we saw several pinpoints of bright light, rising in a precise pattern, coming up from out of some low clouds that obscured the ground. They were ascending in pairs of two. There were six SA-3 surface-to-air missiles heading in our direction, and unlike most of the other SAMs we saw, these six were heading directly at us, on an intercept course with our F-14.

Immediately, our antiquated radar warning receiver (RWR) went bonkers, loudly beeping a signal of impending doom in our headsets and lighting up the RWR display with a graphic depiction of what was happening.

Simultaneously, Ghost, and I watched as the entire sky below us lit up with AAA fire, which was rising up for several miles all the way around our jet. If it weren't for the knowledge that they were trying to kill us, it would have been a beautiful display of fireworks. The light AAA made interesting patterns of orange arcs, rising from the ground, topping out, then descending back down on top of who knows what. The streams of molten metal scribed lazy arcs, with one out of

every ten bullets being a “tracer round.” In between every bullet we could see were nine deadly 23mm rounds, silent and deadly projectiles.

At the same time that the light caliber 23mm AAA was going off, medium caliber AAA started to light up the sky in small bursts all around us. Disconcertingly, the medium AAA was going off a few thousand feet beneath our aircraft, and it really did look like fireworks. If we’d had time to stop and watch, we would have, but what we were most focused on were those six evil pinpoint lights that were still rocketing in our direction at more than three times the speed of sound.

I quickly turned our aircraft a quarter turn away from the evil little flames, I selected Zone Five afterburner, accelerated to more than 500 knots, and then commenced a series of evasive maneuvers that I had been taught at Topgun.

When you’re confronted with a momentous situation where someone is both trying to kill you, and has the means to do so, your brain shrinks to about the size of a peanut, and you are functioning only on stem power. Those patterns of actions that you memorized in training take over, and you are essentially on autopilot.

Everything seemed to slow down as my mind accelerated. I flew our jet through the maneuvers as best as I knew how. At times I could not tell sky from ground, and I was flying mostly on instruments. Occasionally I caught sight of the SAM’s, wondering how I would be able to judge the distance between them and our jet, preparing for the often touted “last-ditch defensive maneuver.” I wondered about when the rocket motors burned out. I wasn’t going to see them then, so how would I know when to do my last ditch maneuver? As I considered our predicament, I knew that it was not good.

I reached down and touched the ejection handle, wondering if we could survive the blast of an SA-3 warhead. For a full second I considered my promise to Ghost’s wife, Cathy, that I would bring him safely home. Ghost and I were teamed together, and he was my responsibility, as I was his. WHY DID I PROMISE CATHY THAT I WOULD BRING GHOST BACK??? Dang it. Note to self: Don’t ever make a promise like that to anyone again.

At that very moment, Ghost was dumping chaff and verifying that our onboard jammer was functioning. Each burst of chaff made a bright flash, as it explosively ejected from one of two “buckets” that we carried between the engines, all the way aft on the bottom of our Tomcat.

Somewhere around that point in time, I started asking Ghost some questions about the equipment that he had control of in his part of the cockpit.

My first question, “Did you turn the jammer on?”
Ghost replied, “Yes. Jammer’s on.”

“Is it in ‘repeat?’”

“Yep, it’s in ‘repeat.’”

From me, “Do you see the light, is the light on?”

Ghost, “Yep, the light’s on.”

“Good, that means it’s working.”

Then I asked a trick question, “Do we have any chaff left?”

Ghost answered, “Yeah, we’ve got chaff left.”

Of course, I unloaded on him, “What are you doing? Dump ALL the chaff. WE’RE NOT GOING TO NEED IT LATER!!! Get rid of it all!!!”

For some reason Ghost had assumed that since the correct answer to the first three questions was yes, then the fourth question must be a yes-question too. Bad assumption. I was not kind to him at that particular moment, but our lives hung in the balance of what we did for those few seconds.

At that instant I could see a large number of bright flashes as Ghost jettisoned whatever remaining chaff we had in our buckets. Of course, I was pushing my chaff thumbwheel for all it was worth, helping to get the aluminum cloud out behind us that would confuse enemy radar operators and help hide our aircraft from their sensors.

Somewhere through the bright flashes of the bursts of chaff we saw several brighter flashes of light, well behind us, but near our altitude. Were the SAMs being command detonated because they failed to achieve intercept? We couldn’t tell. We never knew. All we knew was that we defeated the odds and survived the Iraqi’s attempt to engage us with their missiles and AAA.

Later I wondered, was it Ghost’s quick move with the chaff and jammer? Did my maneuvers win the day? Was it a combination of all of the above? Or, were we just too far out of range for them to tag us that night?

I’m not sure what really brought us back from that mission, I only know that I reached down and considered pulling the handle at one point, because the situation was fairly bleak. If we’d been blown out of the sky, there would have been no other alternative, and in fact we would have been lucky to have that option available to us. Not everyone who is hit by a SAM is able to eject.

A few weeks before that, a classmate of mine from Topgun was shot down. He’d been captured and was a POW for most of the war. We could have suffered a similar fate that night.

Shortly after Desert Storm ended I detached from VF-1 and went to VF-216 Bandits, but I never forgot the lessons I learned that night while fighting to keep from being blown out of the sky by a missile that was traveling three times the speed of my aircraft. I carried those losses with me and taught defensive maneuvering tactics several times over the rest of my career. Without a doubt it was a story I would never forget.

THE AIR-TO-AIR KILL THE F-15 DIDN'T GET

TBD

THE INIMITABLE BUG ROACH

TBD

DESTROYED F-16 CANOPY

Damaged F-16 canopy --- \$200,000; the look on the Crew Chief's face --- Priceless !

From 1991 to 1994 I was assigned to an Adversary Squadron at NAS Miramar called VF-126 Bandits. We flew the A-4 Skyhawk and F-16N Viper, and both were great jets. They were small, maneuverable, hard to find, and deadly in the air-to-air combat arena. Our squadron's charter was to train the F-14 folks at Miramar first, and whatever fuel dollars and flight time we had left over could be used to fly against any other unit that requested our services.

Back in those days the Soviet Union was still a respected enemy, and we simulated Soviet aircraft and tactics in our role to provide airborne targets for the U.S. Military to practice against. If a squadron wanted us to simulate a MiG-29, MiG-23, MiG-21, or whatever, we would employ our aircraft with the proper maneuverability and with the simulated weapons that would give them an accurate "presentation." We would fly whatever scenario they wanted to see. We also employed in formations and with maneuvers that were known to be utilized by the Soviets and by Soviet-trained countries. It was exciting to be on the cutting edge of training, as an adversary pilot, and we all got very good at air combat, because that's all we focused on and practiced every day. The reality was that we rooted for the fighters to win, but as the simulated "bad guys," if they made tactical mistakes we took advantage and punished them for their errors.

As an example, one afternoon I got assigned to lead a section of aircraft to fly against a pair of Marine F/A-18 Hornet that were based out of MCAS El Toro, up in Orange County. We briefed over the phone and agreed to meet in Papa Four, a designated training area west of San Diego.

My wingman was a squadron mate flying an A-4 Skyhawk, and he was simulating a MiG-21 Fishbed. I was simulating a MiG-23 Flogger.

When flying the profile for the MiG-23 in an F-16, you were specifically limited in the amount of "G" and maneuverability that you can use, but you are cleared "full up" in the speed you had available. The aircraft are similar enough in top end speed that an F-16 makes a good presentation of a MiG-23, when flown to the max airspeed limits, as long as you don't exceed the allowed amount of "G."

We got our jets into the air, transited out to station, and set up about 60 miles apart at opposite ends of Papa Four. The Hornets were on the North Station, and our section of Bandits were to the South. The Hornets completed their combat checks, and me and my A-4 wingman were given a call to push out toward the Hornets. We pressed north toward their station.

At around 40 miles from the section of Hornets we executed a pre-briefed maneuver that separated the A-4 and F-16. It was then the job of the Marines to find both of our aircraft and commit simulated missiles against each of our jets. As adversary pilots we wanted the fighters

to do their job and get simulated kills against both of us, but they didn't quite get that done on this run.

At about 15 miles from the Hornets we figured out from the radio calls that both Hornets had targeted my A-4 Skyhawk wingman with their missiles, meaning that I was left untargeted in the F-16. I cleared my wingie to "kill remove," and to detach and turn back south to go to our station and wait for me there. As I pressed north toward a visual intercept I watched as the Hornets made the most elementary of fighter mistakes. At around eight miles they both executed a 180 degree turn, right in front of me, which allowed me to quickly close to a prime position directly behind them and in about a four-mile trail.

I had a tally on both Hornets, and I was snickering as I pushed the throttles forward, lit the afterburners, and gave chase. I disliked Marines in general, and particularly the Marines that flew Hornets. As a group they were arrogant. It was going to be fun to shoot them both down with my simulated Aphid heat-seeking missiles. Marines or not, I had to do it just to emphasize the point that they had made a tactical mistake.

As I accelerated I noticed that the USMC jets were in perfect formation, about a half mile abeam, and that they had descended to 10,000 feet and accelerated to just over mach. They must have felt pretty good, because neither one of them looked aft to clear their tails and ensure nobody was chasing them down. Simulating my MiG-23 Flogger profile, I closed in at about 1.6 mach came up very close behind the Wing Hornet and called "Aphid on the right Hornet," then switched to the Lead Hornet and called "Aphid on the left Hornet."

An Aphid is a short range heat-seeking missile, with a small warhead, but it will easily take down a fighter when fired from "within the envelope," which is exactly where I was.

I called both Hornets "dead" on the radio, and I went blowing by the lead Hornet at mega knots. By this point in time I was going so fast that the lead aircraft looked like it was standing still. I went really close by the lead aircraft, just to make a point regarding the speed of a MiG-23, and I was laughing like a little girl. It was a great day in my world, and at that particular moment all was right with the universe.

As I passed the section of F/A-18s I looked up in my HUD and noticed that my airspeed was 850 indicated knots. CRAP! The redline on the F-16 is 780, and at 850 I was well over the max speed number. Strange things happen to parts of a Viper at that speed, not the least of which is that the bubble canopy tends to become overheated. The one thing you didn't want to do in a Viper was to test the ability of the canopy to withstand a speed that it was not engineered for. In only a second or two my situation had rapidly deteriorated.

My first and only reaction was to pull the throttles to idle, thumb out the speed brakes, and execute a 9 "G" pitch up into the vertical, pointing my jet straight up. Normally you would scrub a

lot of excess speed by pulling “Gs” and by pointing an aircraft up, but that was not to be this day as I was going way too fast for the laws of physics and gravity to work against all that remarkable kinetic energy I had going on.

At about 30,000 feet, and still doing well over 200 knots, I initiated a turn back to level flight. Right as I started my turn I heard the loudest “BANG” I have ever heard. Simultaneous with the BANG I witnessed something no pilot ever wants to see. The canopy was intact, but the entire surface was instantaneously and completely covered by a massive “spiderweb” of cracks. I pushed the gear/flap switch down to keep my speed under control, lowered my seat, slowed to 170 knots, and spiraled as quickly as I could, all the way back down to 10,000 feet.

Once back at 10K, I took a quick look around to make sure the Hornets weren’t still hanging around, almost as if they might see my plight and they would get the last laugh. They deserved to get the last laugh. I just broke my jet doing something stupid, putting myself and my airplane at risk in the process.

With my tail between my legs I made the long transit back to Miramar, staying at 10,000 feet and 170 knots all the way, to help ensure the canopy didn’t implode into the cockpit making things much worse. At that speed it was a very long flight home. All the way back I was trying to think of what I would say to the maintenance folks and to the duty officer, that could explain the damage that I had caused. During the 30-minute flight home I could not think of a single thing to say, no excuses were good enough, so I just made the obligatory call back to Base that my jet was “down for canopy.” I also made a deal with myself to wait to see what the folks on the ground had to say first, before I talked about what happened.

I landed uneventfully, taxied into my designated parking spot, and waited for the Crew Chief to give me the signals to complete my shut down checklist. The whole time I was going through shut down procedures the Crew Chief kept looking at me shaking his head in disgust. I just knew that he knew the whole story and that he was really pissed. He was the guy who was going to have to fix the jet, and I was imagining that he was going to be working 14-16 hours that day. Man, did he look mad.

As I climbed down the boarding ladder it was all I could do to chew on my tongue and not say anything. When I got to the bottom of the ladder really caught me by surprise. The first thing I heard my Crew Chief saw was, “I knew that was going to happen.” What? What did you just say??? He then repeated those simple words, “I knew that was going to happen.” I responded with something along the lines of, “What are you talking about?” He explained, “You know that light crazing (cracks) on the front of the windscreen? I had an idea one of those might develop into a bigger crack and crack the whole canopy.” “You Asshole!” I replied, “You knew the canopy might crack, and you let me take this jet out anyway?”

Of course busting the canopy had nothing to do with him. It wasn't his fault, but I wasn't about to get myself into a huge pile of trouble by telling the real story, that I had exceeded flight limitations by a significant margin.

There's an axiom in Naval Aviation that goes: "Admit nothing, deny everything, and make counter-accusations whenever possible." Navy Wings of Gold are hard-earned, and carefully kept, and the privilege of taking a multi-million-dollar piece of equipment to lofty heights requires diligent care and feeding. Pilot's reputations are often built on one or two events, some of which could cause them to lose their wings, or which could result in a new "callsign" that would follow them around for the rest of their lives. I was at one of those crossroads where I probably would not have lost my flying status, but I would have gotten a whole new reputation out of the event, and I somehow managed to escape the scrutiny of my peers and seniors. Thankfully I was provided a way out, and I took it.

Later that day my Crew Chief told me that the cost of replacing the canopy was around \$200,000. He said that they had one in the supply system and that they'd have my jet back up in the air within a couple of days. I don't really recall much about the conversation except that neither he nor I was in trouble.

As was usual for such flights, I had recorded the HUD tape of the ill-fated intercept against the Marine Hornets. Nobody asked to see my tape, and I didn't volunteer to show it.

The next day I had another flight in the Viper, and when I got in the jet I put my tape in the recorder, turned on the record switch, and I let it run until the whole tape had been recorded over, all the evidence was gone!

It was two years before I told this story for the first time, to a buddy, while sitting at the bar and mulling over the mysteries of life over a beer. Since then I've told the story another half-dozen times, but this is the first time I've written it down. But to this day, if anyone calls me to account for the loss of that canopy I'll admit nothing, deny that it happened, and make aggressive counter-accusations in the process. :-)

LOSING JIMBO (DEC 1993)

During my next three years in VF-126 Bandits, we amassed an amazing and unenviable record of disaster. In three years we lost four jets and two pilots. Two of our aircraft losses were due to mechanical malfunctions, and the other two resulted from pilot error. My first fleet tour in VF-1 Wolfpack was the only time in the Navy that I went an entire tour without watching my squadron crash at least one jet. Little did I know how good I had it.

In mid-December 1992 a VF-126 pilot named "Jimbo" launched on a cross-country flight to Twin Falls, Idaho. Jimbo was relatively new to the F-16, having just completed his F-16 training syllabus at MacDill AFB in Tampa. This particular weekend he took his F-16 north to visit his uncle, but his choice in destinations was not well planned, primarily due to an inclement weather forecast.

On the return leg of his trip, Jimbo launched into a low cloud deck, became disoriented during an excessively steep climb out, and lost track of which way his aircraft was going. Approximately six miles from the runway he exited the bottom of a cloud at 500 knots, heading nearly straight down. There wasn't sufficient room to recover back to level flight, and he hit the ground in a steep dive. The end result was that a beautiful and sophisticated, multi-million-dollar F-16 was instantly turned from a sleek fighter into a gazillion fragmented pieces of unusable and unidentifiable trash, AND Jimbo lost his life in the process.

From the moment Jimbo exited the cloud and first spotted the ground he was outside of the ejection envelope. His rate of descent was too high, and he would not have survived had he pulled the handle. We still wondered why he didn't at least try to get out. Maybe he realized it was too late and was trying to make the turn back to level flight while hoping not to hit the ground. He had commanded full aft stick and was approaching 9 "Gs" when he hit. We will never know exactly what he was thinking at that moment, but I like to think that he was trying to save himself and his plane.

There is a statistic in aircraft crashes that says that when a pilot screws up and makes an error, they are more likely to stay with the jet to try to save it. It's human nature to say "I got myself into this situation, I'm going to get myself out." But when something mechanical goes wrong, it's easier to make the decision to abandon the aircraft. Some aircrew term that decision as "giving the jet back to the taxpayer." If the jet lets you down, you have no allegiance or loyalty to it, and you are willing to abandon it. However, if you let the jet down, you do all you can to save it. Right or wrong, that's how aircrew think.

The Mishap Board initially consisted of "Rookie," "Max," "Moondog," "Doc," and myself. Eventually "Jaws," a Navy Commander at the time, joined us as the Senior Member of the Board.

The day after the crash we arrived at the accident site. It was in the middle of a large field and was only accessible by four-wheel drive. It was 30 minutes south of the town of Twin Falls. Our first experience on scene was being confronted by an Air National Guard Colonel, who walked us around the site, showing us little pieces of gristle they had found, proving that Jimbo was in the cockpit when the F-16 crashed. Up until that point we didn't know for certain whether or not he had ejected. Riding a jet straight into the ground at 500 knots leaves almost no evidence that there was a human being onboard. It's crazy how little we found of Jimbo. What we did find was sent home to Illinois for a hero's burial.

Standing at the edge and peering down into the hole the first time was a life-changing experience. I'll never forget looking into the hole, or smelling the smell of jet fuel that permeated the entire area. Oddly, nothing of significance was found in the hole. There was just some evidence of two wingtips carving their way down through the ground, but that's all we got out of it. You could see the angle of impact, and take a few measurements, but there was very little of the aircraft in there. That was surprising.

When it hit the ground the F-16 was 80 degrees nose low and ten degrees right wing down. It made a hole that was 20 to 25 feet deep. If the ground hadn't been frozen solid the hole probably would have been deeper. For lack of a better description, the wreckage "splashed" around the outside of the hole, with 80 to 90% of it landing within 100 yards. The largest piece of wreckage was a part of the engine that was no bigger than the bottom half of a desk chair. Everything else was just small bits of trash. It was all junk by looking at it.

Out in front of the hole, directly in line with the direction the F-16 was traveling, was a "flame pattern" of wreckage that went out at least half a mile. It was only about 10 degrees wide, and the pattern of wreckage was heading directly away from the airport. 10 to 20% of the wreckage was in that flame pattern. So when the F-16 hit the ground, 80 degrees nose low, even though it only had a 20 degree forward velocity component wreckage was distributed out to more than 2,000 feet away from the site. That is a lot of force at impact.

After taking a bit of time to process the fact that we had just lost a buddy at the crash site, we set about the task of picking up airplane pieces and looking for critical parts of the aircraft. On the left side of the hole I noticed that there was a strange yellow plastic blob of molten material that had obviously melted and refrozen. It was an inch or two thick, fairly flat and kind of sculpture-looking, and it was about the size of a nice coffee table. It took me a while to figure out that it was the canopy. At impact, and due to the extraordinary force of the crash, the canopy instantaneously turned from a solid into a liquid, it splashed on the left side of the hole, then it turned back into a solid again. I had no idea that something like that could happen.

Jimbo's mishap was the first crash of a Navy jet where a flight data recorder (black box) was onboard. Everyone in the safety world was anxious to download the data and reconstruct the

flight profile. That would have told us a lot. We spent a lot of time sifting through the trash of the wreckage to find the box.

Data recorders are called “the black box” on TV, but the reality is that they are painted orange so that they will be easily recognizable and will look different from the other parts of the aircraft when you go hunting for them. They really should start calling them “the orange box,” because that’s what color they really are.

The F-16’s data recorder is designed to withstand something like 30,000 “G’s,” or 30,000 times the force of gravity. When we found amongst the other wreckage it was a huge disappointment. Unfortunately it had been crushed to the point of rendering the chips inside completely unusable. Strange things happen when a jet hits the ground at 500 knots.

We also focused on finding pieces of the instrument panel that could tell the story of what the jet was doing when it hit. Additionally, we looked for the flight control actuators, because they told the story about what was happening with the controls. We got enough of the engine back to know that it was working properly at impact. One at a time we ruled out all the major systems as potential causes. That’s how mishap investigations go. You find things that are working normally and rule out causes by default, then you focus on whatever’s left and on what the other evidence indicates.

During the mishap investigation we looked at a lot of different factors while we played pin the tail on the donkey, as we deliberated the causes that could be explained by the preponderance of evidence. When the dust settled there was only one plausible explanation, and that was that Jimbo became disoriented in the clouds, lost track of which way was up and which way was down, and exited the clouds with insufficient room to recover back to level flight. Disorientation is not all that uncommon in the conditions that he was in. Crashing due to disorientation is a lot less common, but sometimes it happens.

Every Mishap Board has a duty to look at everything that could possibly have contributed to the crash, and we invested quite a bit of time learning details about the man that was operating the machine. As we turned over rocks in Jimbo’s personal life, we found something ugly hiding under every rock. Jimbo had so many issues going on in his personal life that his level of stress must have been horrendous. Everywhere we looked we found new problems that nobody seemed to be aware of before the accident. At some point during the investigation the Mishap Board came to an agreement that we would all stop asking questions. We didn’t need to know any more about Jimbo’s life than we already knew. The bottom line is that he was under way more stress than the average pilot can handle, and that may have been a contributing factor to the mishap.

For years afterward, Jimbo’s accident was used by the Safety School as an example of pilot stress and how it contributes to aircraft crashes. As a result, a new process was started called

the Human Factors Board (HFB). At the HFB every pilot in every squadron is periodically reviewed by their squadron for human factors that might impact their ability to safely fly a high performance aircraft. More than 20 years later, that process is still part of the workings of Naval Aviation.

For every crash there is at least one new rule, and for Jimbo's crash the HFB was the result. Unofficially, he is the Father of the HFB.

As I neared the end of my time in the Bandits I received orders to the VF-213 Blacklions. I did everything I could to try to get out of going to VF-213. I knew several of the guys in the squadron, and they were the best of the best, but I did not want to be associated with another squadron that had a terrible accident record---especially after my tour in VF-126.

In April 1994 I detached from the Bandits and headed down the flight line to join VF-124 Gunfighters as a student. I was there for just a few months, in order to receive refresher training in the F-14 Tomcat. After piloting the A-4 Skyhawk and F-16N Viper it was hard to go back to the big, lumbering imprecise Tomcat. But I could not imagine another life and I mentally prepared myself for another fleet tour flying F-14's. If I'd known then what I know now, I probably would have quit the Navy and gone back to waiting tables, or maybe I'd be working at a 7-Eleven, or maybe as a janitor, or I'd do something else, anything else.

While assigned to VF-124 my main purpose was to requalify as a carrier pilot. Of all the things a Navy pilot can do, landing on a carrier is one of the most challenging, one of the most difficult, and often one of the most fun things to do. As I started the training syllabus I was strangely looking forward to getting back to the ship, but as it turned out that was not necessarily the best place to be.

A few months later I left VF-124 and joined VF-213 Blacklions. Some of the best people I have ever met in the Navy worked in that squadron. But in spite of the fact that top folks were being assigned to the Lions, and in spite of the fact that they were slowly changing the organization for the better, the two years I spent in VF-213 were tough ones. We crashed four jets and buried three aircrew. It was not good.

KARA HULTGREEN (OCT 1994)

Stepping back in time for just a moment, shortly after checking into VF-124 Gunfighters to get retrained in F-14s, I joined a class that was in the process of completing the latter stages of their initial training in the F-14. The class consisted mostly of pilots who were new to the Tomcat. Interestingly, two of my classmates were the first two female pilots in the F-14. It was the post-Tailhook era, and the Navy had recently removed the barriers that prevented women from being assigned to combat aircraft. The idea was right, the timing was right, but unfortunately they picked some of the wrong females to make this transition.

The two women in my F-14 class went by the names of “Flipper” and “Ralph.” Ralph’s callsign was earned, because she threw up in the cockpit. Unfortunately, Ralph was excrement, both as a pilot and as a squadron mate. She was truly one of the worst human beings to don a flightsuit. Ralph was way below average in her abilities, she had an ego that far exceeded her stature, and she had something to prove about being one of the first few women in Tomcats. Those three attributes were a deadly combination of traits, and they were either going to get her killed or put her squadronmates in jeopardy, neither of which were acceptable.

Flipper, on the other hand, was amazing. She was a breath of fresh air, was a decent pilot, and had a great attitude. Because of that, I took an immediate liking to her. She was not only a much better pilot than Ralph, but more importantly she just wanted to be one of the squadron pilots, she just wanted to fit in, and she just wanted to fly.

Flipper loved being a part of Naval Aviation, and in spite of being saddled with the unenviable role of being the first female fighter pilot in the Navy, Flipper had an unmistakable fire in her eye and bounce in her step that marked her as one who would achieve success. The fact that she had some natural talent and was willing to learn didn’t hurt. Ralph, on the other hand, was entirely another matter. We tried our best, but we never found a way to get her to drop her bad attitude and join the group as one of the team. The fact that she was struggling as a pilot, and the fact that she was extraordinarily unsafe around the ship, probably didn’t help.

In July 1994 the three of us (Flipper, Ralph, and I) completed our F-14 carrier qualifications aboard the USS Constellation. Shortly after that we all checked into VF-213 and joined the squadron as their three newest pilots.

The Blacklions had some of the best pilots and RIO’s at Miramar, and they had the worst accident record in Tomcat history. During my two-year tour with the Lions that record would be sustained and lengthened. It was a hideous time, and our aircraft and personnel losses were devastating to me, both professionally and personally.

In October of 1994 Flipper was assigned as my wingman, and I was excited to be in charge of a portion of her training. She was crewed with a young RIO that went by the name of “Shaggy.”

He was an excellent RIO and officer. In my back seat I had a guy named "HOB," which was short for "head of bone." HOB was a truly loveable and competent young aviator, and I loved flying with him.

Shaggy and HOB were both in the middle of their first F-14 tour, and they were each stellar guys. They had great personalities and were both popular with their squadronmates.

On October 25th of 1995 I led Flipper out to the USS Lincoln, as our air wing began a four-week at-sea period. We left Miramar early in the afternoon and proceeded to a holding point several dozen miles south of San Diego. The Lincoln was out there, on station, awaiting the arrival of its aircraft for the first part of our at-sea training. Over the next two days more than 40 aircraft would fly aboard, as we prepared for several planned exercises. Flipper and I were among the first few aircraft that were scheduled to arrive.

We were assigned to hold 22 miles aft of the ship, and they prepared the flight deck to receive us. After a 15-minute delay in holding we were signaled to turn inbound, commence our descent, and prepare to enter the landing pattern. It was a Case II approach, which means that the weather was bad enough to prevent us from holding directly overhead the ship, but it was not so bad that we couldn't enter a visual pattern after an initial instrument approach.

A low overcast layer extended from 800 feet above the water to around 2,000 feet. During our approach I flew down through the overcast with Flipper on my wing, descending to get below the clouds. Flipper was on my right wing, flying tight formation, and I was leading us through the required checkpoints for the Case II approach. This was going to be Flipper's first carrier landing in more than a month, and she was excited about the opportunity to hone her skills as a fairly new carrier pilot.

Ten miles aft of the ship we "broke out" beneath the ragged edge of the grey clouds that we had descended through. They obscured the sky above us. It was early afternoon, and the sun provided occasional rays of light, peeking through a few holes in the clouds. Otherwise everything underneath was a shade of monochrome grey. This was typical conditions at sea for that time of year.

I brought Flipper into the "break" at 380 knots. The break is a 360-degree turning pattern, where you fly over the ship in the same direction that you will be landing, and you initiate a hard left turn to reverse course back toward the landing area. As you are on "downwind," traveling in the opposite direction as the ship, you lower the landing gear and flaps and slow the aircraft to landing speed. As the ship passes off your left side, you immediately commence a 180-degree descending turn to final. The last 18-seconds of the approach are the most critical. During this phase you have to work fairly hard to ensure the aircraft is on glide path, on airspeed, and on line-up.

Carrier pilots aim for a spot in space that is about two feet high, plus or minus five feet wide, and they are allowed about a two knots deviation from their target airspeed. They aim for this small point in space while traveling more than 140 mph. As if it were not challenging enough, the ship is a constantly moving target. It turns, it speeds up, it slows down, and in rough seas it pitches, and heaves, and rolls, often all three at the same time. The training you get as a Navy Pilot is excellent, but landing on the ship is definitely a varsity sport.

As we approached the break, Flipper and I continued a mile past the ship before I broke off and initiated my hard left turn toward the downwind. Flipper continued “upwind,” delaying her turn for around 17-seconds, in order to get the proper separation between aircraft for landing. This put her a mile-and-a-half behind me on downwind and opened up a 45-second interval between our aircraft at touchdown. 45-seconds is the amount of time it takes the flight deck to clear an aircraft out of the landing area and reset the arresting gear so that it is ready for the next aircraft.

I lost sight of Flipper behind me, as I commenced my break turn. I lowered the gear and flaps and completed a landing checklist. As I looked down at the Lincoln, I noted that the flight deck was empty and devoid of aircraft. HOB and I were going to be the first Tomcat to land aboard the Lincoln that day. We had our hook down and were ready for landing as we turned to final and prepared for those critical last 18-seconds prior to landing.

Approximately 10 seconds before touching down the Landing Signals Officers (LSO's) turned on the flashing red lights and radioed for us to “wave off.” The flight deck was not quite ready, and I pushed the throttles all the way forward and initiated a go-around. It was just as well with me. Flying is freedom, and being stuck on the ship is like being on a floating grey prison---except with the added danger of potentially drowning. Our freedom from the gray Lincoln prison had just been extended a few more precious minutes, and nothing was wrong with that.

Landing Signals Officers are a necessary evil of carrier aviation. They stand on a small “platform” located near the aft end of the ship, and they closely watch and grade every carrier landing. They are so critical to the process that if they are not back there on the LSO platform, you are not allowed to land. They make sure every landing is a safe one, and for the most part they do an excellent job at that.

The best grade you can normally receive from an LSO is an “OK.” Everything else is a deviation of a sort and results in a lesser grade. The LSOs will reward you with a “fair” or “no grade” if your approach is either not perfect, or really bad. The grades the LSOs give out are displayed on a board in each of the ship's eight ready rooms. This board is called the “greenie board,” and colored dots are lined up next to each pilot's name allowing everyone to see how well they are doing in their landings. There's tremendous pressure to do well in carrier landings, and the difference between the best pilot and the tenth best pilot is often determined by a very thin margin. One or two landing grades can make a huge difference. Comparisons between

individuals and between squadrons are made daily, and everyone knows how well everyone else is doing. Landing grades are hyper-competitive on the ship.

When you're making your final approach to the ship the LSO's don't talk much on the radio. In some cases, you radio to them your aircraft side number and your fuel state, to which they reply "roger ball." Otherwise, if and when the LSO's have to push the button on their mic and say something to you, it's only because you have deviated from a safe or smooth approach. When an LSO talks to you on the radio, it virtually guarantees you won't get an "OK" grade for that approach.

As I was directed to wave-off I continued upwind, spotted Flipper, looked to ensure there were no other aircraft in the pattern, and I took interval off Flipper and got behind her to follow her through the landing pattern. As Flipper was on final approach I passed directly abeam the ship and initiated my turn to final. That's when I heard the LSO's start talking to Flipper. From that point there was a continuous stream of emphatic communication, and I stopped watching my own approach and locked my eyeballs on her aircraft.

HOB and I focused on Flipper's jet as we watched it descend toward the water in a shallow left turn. It was not apparent she and Shaggy had lost their left engine and were rapidly running out of airspeed. Significantly, their aircraft did not appear to be leveling off. In an instant, and at an altitude of around 60 feet, their Tomcat rolled dramatically to the left. A nice day at the ship had just turned really sour.

In slow motion I watched as the canopy was explosively jettisoned. One ejection seat came out, rocketing away from the aircraft at an angle that was parallel to the surface of the water. Less than half a second later the second seat fired at a 45-degree angle, directly down toward the sea. At a terminal velocity of 180 knots, the second seat skipped once off the surface of the water and then disappeared beneath a wave. Simultaneously a parachute momentarily opened, and a small figure hit the water feet first, with a full parachute canopy above them.

There's no training in the world that can prepare you for the emotional turmoil of losing a squadron mate. Even now, more than 20 years later, it brings a queasy, sickening feeling to me, just to think about it. I admired Flipper as a pilot and liked her as a friend, and it was shocking to lose her. Thank God for Shaggy's quick reaction. His life was spared by the thinnest of margins.

A week later I found myself assigned to an Aircraft Mishap Board whose purpose was to investigate the facts leading to the loss of Flipper and her Tomcat. We were also to make recommendations that would prevent similar events from occurring in the future. They say that you can't be a material witness or a participant in a mishap and still be assigned to the board. I was both a participant as the flight lead, and I was a witness with a unique perspective as an airborne observer, and yet I was still on the Mishap Board.

It was difficult to relive the experience hundreds of times over and over again, as we played and replayed videotaped footage of Kara's crash. As I watched the tape a thought kept coming back to me, "what was Flipper thinking in her final moments?" I wanted to know. I had to know. Was she scared? Optimistic? Resigned? Afraid? There was only one thing I knew for certain, and that was that Flipper was doing her darn best to fly that jet, all the way up until the point where she was ejected from the cockpit. She was no quitter, and I was sure she didn't give up, even to the very end.

Tomcats were known for having engines that were susceptible to stall, and due to her aggressive handling of the aircraft Kara had stalled her left motor. Fighter jets absolutely should not have motors that can easily be stalled, but that's what we had, and there was a component of pilot error that caused Kara's engine to quit producing thrust. As she descended down toward the water she recognized the stall too late to apply the proper inputs that would recover the aircraft to level flight, with only one good engine. It was a tough situation, and I doubt many pilots with her experience level would have done any better than she did.

During the investigation, as usual we overturned every stone we could find in order to gather all the evidence that was available. At one point Ralph stopped me in the corridor, as I was headed back into a Mishap Board meeting. She had some critical information that she had to relay to me, as a member of the board and all that. As Ralph started to talk she said something along the lines of, "I knew Kara wasn't as good of a pilot as everyone said she was." No kidding? That's the evidence you've got for me? I calmly replied back, "Ok, I'll let the rest of the Mishap Board know." She nodded her head, seemingly satisfied that her supposedly critical information would be delivered to the board, and it would somehow help us sort out the crash. Of course, I told the rest of the board nothing about my encounter.

It was fitting a few months later when Ralph was removed from flight status for being unsafe during night landings aboard the ship. The rest of the squadron breathed a sigh of relief when she was grounded, because nothing good was going to come out of her continuing to fly an airplane that was well beyond her abilities.

Ralph's bad attitude was the kicker. As someone who personally flew with her, and who tried my best to integrate her into the squadron and get her trained, I can confidently say that Ralph's excessive ego combined with her poor attitude to make it impossible for her to overcome her well below average skillset. I'm sure she has a different view of that time, but I worked with hundreds of young pilots over my career, and I never met one who was as untrainable as Ralph. If she had possessed a better attitude she might have been useful to the Navy in some other capacity, but her "officer-like qualities" and her "leadership skills" were both bottom of the barrel.

Today Ralph is a motivational speaker who bills herself as the first female F-14 fighter pilot. Somehow she was able to go from being a utter failure and a washout to being a stellar leader of Naval Aviation. It's bizarre, and it's tough to figure out how that could have happened. I admit

that I've never attended one of her seminars, but I'm pretty sure that she neglects to mention to her audiences that she was removed from flying the F-14 due to her gross incompetence as a pilot. In a twisted way, I'm actually impressed by her being able to build a successful career on a total farce. Very few people have that skillset, but everyone's good at something, and I think we finally discovered out what Ralph is good at. Too bad we didn't know that earlier. We might have been able to turn her into something useful, like maybe a Navy attorney, or perhaps a contract negotiator, or something along those lines.

The real story about Ralph will never come out, because the majority of the aircrew who served with her in the Lions have made a mutual pact to never ever say her name out loud. To this day if I said her name in front of one of my Lion friends I would get shushed, or punched, or something. No other aircrew that I served with was ever put into that same category. Congratulations Ralph, you are truly an overachiever!

A few weeks after Kara died I wrote Sally Spears, her mom, a letter, telling her a few of the things about Kara that endeared her to myself and to the squadron. A couple of years later I was in a bookstore and spotted a book that was written by Sally Spears. The title of Sally's book was *Callsign: Revlon*, and it was all about Kara and her life, and her career as a Navy Pilot. Apparently Sally didn't get the memo that Kara's callsign was DEFINITELY Flipper. I think Sally liked Revlon better and tried to immortalize her daughter as that instead. However, for those of us who knew her and flew with her, Kara was and always will be Flipper. There's a great story connected with how she got that, but in the interest of time and space I'll forego the explanation.

80% of my letter to Sally is somewhere in her book. It was dissected into pieces and inserted into the stories, a little here and a little there. She did this without my permission, I might add, but the fact was that I didn't mind. It's a great book, and it says a lot of interesting things about Kara, who was the REAL First Female F-14 pilot.

I am proud to have known Kara and to have flown with her, but for goodness sake her callsign is Flipper!

F-14'S DON'T JUST "BLOW UP" (20 SEPT 1995)

In the F-14 there are two ejection handles on each of the Martin Baker GRU7 ejection seats. The upper handle protrudes horizontally over the pilot's helmet. It has an integrated "face curtain" designed to protect the face and head from fire and windblast. The lower ejection handle is the preferred method of departure. It is at the front of the seat and must be pulled upward with around 40 pounds of force in order to initiate the ejection sequence.

When any one of the four handles in the cockpit are pulled an irreversible sequence is commenced. The canopy immediately leaves the aircraft, as it is explosively jettisoned upward and aft. After a half-second delay the rear seat fires and rockets its occupant upward. A half-second later the front seat fires and flies a similar profile. For the Tomcat the rear seat is designed to go up and slightly right, and the front seat goes slightly left. This way a small bit of lateral separation is developed between the ejection seats as they go rocketing through the air.

Ejection from an aircraft is anything but benign. The initial upward push imparts a force that is 10-15 times the force of gravity. If the aircraft is traveling faster than 350 knots life threatening injuries may be sustained. The faster you're going, the more the likelihood of injury.

"Opening shock" occurs when the parachute opens, which causes a 10 to 20 "G" deceleration force as the aircrew is rapidly slowed from a buck-eighty to parachute descent speed. At opening shock the harness straps instantly tighten. Even though they only move a few millimeters, wherever the straps are close to the body, they cause rope burns. Even though you're wearing at least two layers of clothing, including a nomex flightsuit, you still get rope burns.

Even after you get out of the jet, high parachute descent rates make the ground landing hazardous. A few aviators have ejected, gotten a good parachute, and have not survived the landing. For those who land in the water, the parachute can come down on directly top of you, and you can get entangled in the parachute lines. This presents the lovely hazard of possibly drowning.

Ejection is only used as a last resort, and there's no guarantee you're going to be able to walk away. But 99 times out of 100, it beats the alternative. Ejection is not meant to keep you healthy and uninjured, it's only meant to keep you alive.

Less than a year after we lost Flipper, VF-213 and Air Wing 11 were deployed to the Persian Gulf aboard the USS Lincoln. We were flying combat sorties over Iraq as part of Operation Southern Watch. Not much was happening, but we continuously patrolled the No Fly Zone, preventing the Iraqi Air Force from attacking the Kurds with their jets and helicopters. It seemed like a long six-month cruise, and most of it was spent in the Persian Gulf.

After our time in the Gulf was over, the Lincoln headed south, rounded the tip of India, and turned east for the remaining three-week journey home. The flying became sparse and our minds were focused on returning home to our loved ones. I clearly recall the day we sailed through the Philippine Islands, and I marveled at the scenery. Even though you never hear about it in that light, the "P.I." is a tropical paradise of extraordinary beauty.

The day after we passed through the P.I., I was on the flight schedule as a "spare" for a day flight. I had just been assigned a new RIO, a fun and lively junior officer (JO) named "Buga." Earlier in the deployment, while we were on a port stop in Hong Kong, and Buga and I found ourselves at the same British pub one night. I tagged along with him, knowing that something memorable would probably happen that night. Of course, there were two young British girls at the pub, visiting from England. Being in a lively good mood Buga jovially and verbally accosted the girls with some interesting comments about their monarchy, which were delivered in his best British accent, which actually wasn't very good. Then and there I named him Buga, which was short for Big Ugly American. Later we had a Callsign Review Board on the ship. His new name stuck, and he still wears it to this day. I named him, and shortly after that he saved my life. I love that!

Buga and I went, up to the flight deck to "man up" Lion 112, our assigned aircraft for the "spare." It was September 20th, 1995, a day neither one of us will ever forget.

As the assigned "spare," our job was to start our aircraft and to be ready to fill in if one of the "primary jets" should have mechanical difficulties. The spare aircrew starts the engines, completes all preflight checks, and passes a "thumbs up" to their plane captain, noting that they are ready to go. Normally it's a treat to launch as the spare, because you get off the floating prison on a day that you are otherwise not on the schedule. But that particular day I didn't care if we launched or not, and I would have been just as happy staying on the ship. We were only a couple of weeks from being home, and my mind was on other things.

A few minutes after passing the "ready to launch" signal, Buga and I saw our Plane Captain scurrying around our jet removing the eight chains that held it tightly to the deck. We were parked well aft on the starboard side of the ship, and we could not see which aircraft had developed a problem, or who we were filling in for. Buga made a couple of calls on the radio, and we found Haggis' aircraft had gone "down." We received a last second update on our mission and got ready for the launch.

As we taxied our Tomcat toward the catapult Buga and I quickly completed the takeoff checklist and readied ourselves for the cat shot. Zero to 160 mph in under two seconds, a cat shot is better than any roller coaster invented. Once we were airborne and cleaning the aircraft up, we rocketed toward the USS John Paul Jones and prepared to execute our assigned mission.

The John Paul Jones is an Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyer whose primary mission is to protect the aircraft carrier from missile attack. The JPJ as she is affectionately known was the third Arleigh Burke ship built, but she was the first to be assigned to the Pacific Fleet. With her AEGIS radar and an impressive array of air, surface, and subsurface weapons, she is capable of defending the carrier against attack from a variety of sources.

Our mission was to provide an air target for the JPJ to track with her AEGIS radar. They were testing new software functions on the radar, and we were happy to give them a simulated target to track. We checked in with our controller and received our instructions. We were to do a low-altitude high-speed fly by. So we proceeded to a point approximately 50 miles aft of the JPJ and waited for our signal to turn inbound. After a short delay they cleared us in hot.

I pushed the throttles up, lowered the nose, and quickly accelerated to a comfortable 400 knots. We were still more than an hour from our briefed landing time, and I had to save enough gas to get us safely back to the carrier. About 20 miles from the JPJ we found a hole in the clouds, dove underneath a 5,000-foot layer, and continued our descent down to 800 feet above the water where we leveled off. At 10 miles I pushed the throttles forward into full afterburner and accelerated Lion 112 our fly-past.

Our Tomcat picked up speed and approached transonic regime, which is between subsonic and supersonic flight. Our altimeter was characteristically bouncing up and down plus or minus seven hundred feet, so I transitioned my scan to the radar altimeter, which measured our actual distance above the water. I also checked to ensure our altitude remained above our briefed 500-foot minimum.

Inside seven miles we began seeing a big white puff in our mirrors, as a large cloud formed on the back half of our aircraft. I first noticed it in the mirrors, then I turned my head and looked aft. I never ceased to marvel at the vapor cloud that formed around an aircraft as it approached supersonic flight. At transonic speeds a shock wave forms around the jet, and in humid climates the shock wave becomes visible, as an indication of where the boundary is between the subsonic and supersonic airflow. I've seen F-14's at supersonic speeds, where only the nose of the jet was sticking out through a wedge shaped cloud that covered the rest of the aircraft. It's an amazing thing to see.

About five miles from the JPJ I took one last glance at our airspeed. It showed 580 knots, and climbing.

As the JPJ passed down our left side, Buga and I looked down at the deck of the ship. There were dozens of Sailors on the deck, all who had climbed up out of ship innards to watch our Tomcat fly past. It's a rare treat to be at sea and to have an aircraft go by low and in a blaze of speed. They were undoubtedly enjoying the sight. Little did they know they would be witnesses to something more than just a fly-by.

Immediately after passing the JPJ I initiated a 5 “G” climbing right turn, up and away from the water. As I snapped the stick aft and initiated an easy right turn, our F-14 began a violent and uncontrollable roll to the left. Within a fraction of a second our jet went from happily flying along to fiercely tumbling out of control. As our aircraft rolled and yawed left, my head banged hard off the right side of the canopy. Instantly I could not tell sky from water. I looked down to the engine instruments to see if there was a problem with one of our motors, but there didn’t seem to be any information on the gauges. I noticed a flicker of flame on the right side of the aircraft and thought I might have stalled the right motor, but nothing seemed to make any sense.

Several thoughts went through my mind. “This can’t be happening. How did it happen? What did I do to cause this? Can I fly out of this?” Concerning our dire predicament at that moment, I was in denial that it was even happening.

At this point I experienced an extreme case of time expansion. For the next two seconds I lived around forty-minutes of thoughts and observations. My body continued to react in real-time, but my thoughts accelerated. I experienced the classic “life passing before your eyes” experience that we’ve all heard about. My thoughts went first to my wife and children, as I replayed my recent interactions with them. I thought about Flipper and recognized that this must have been the same experience she had gone through. There was no fear, and there was no regret. Everything was logical and matter-of-fact. In some ways it was as if I was a disinterested observer, watching everything happen around me in slow motion. It was a world of multiple simultaneous thoughts and flashes of observation, many of which were completely disconnected from each other. I lived a lifetime in those two seconds.

At the same time I was concerned with our altitude and trajectory, believing water impact was imminent. I knew in my mind that this event was not survivable, and I wondered if it would hurt when we hit the water. Then I mused about how stupid that was. Death would be instantaneous and easy. Again, no regrets.

When I saw the canopy leave the aircraft and I thought “good on you Buga. We’re not going to make it, but at least you gave it a try. We won’t be the guys who never pull the handle, and everyone wonders why not.” I considered the 600+ knots that we had been traveling and wondered what kind of severe injuries would be caused by the supersonic windblast. I let go of the stick and throttles, crossed my arms, and grabbed my survival vest as hard as I could, wondering if it was even possible to hold on. Either way, riding the jet into the water, or hitting 600 knots of wind in the face, I had no doubt that we would not make it.

Five feet behind me, Buga’s experience was quite different. He didn’t notice the aircraft tumbling violently out of control, and very soon after our jet rolled left there was a fire in the aft cockpit. Buga quickly assessed the situation as not survivable, and he pulled the lower ejection handle.

For Buga there was no question about whether or not the jet could be saved, it was time to leave, and he got us both out.

As the canopy left our Tomcat I became aware of an extremely hot fire that surrounded what remained of our jet. I closed my eyes and squinted through the flames, watching as a bright flash went off, which I assumed was Buga's ejection seat rocket motor firing. I closed my eyes the rest of the way, and I held on waiting for my turn to go. The wind was really going to hurt, and at this point I was sitting in the middle of a big ball of flames getting burned.

My seat violently fired up the rail, safely separating me from the burning wreckage of Lion 112. When I cleared the cockpit there was absolutely no windblast, whatsoever. I was quickly separated from my ejection seat, and my parachute opened hard, cinching me down into my harness with tremendous force. I was alive. Very surprised, but alive. "Thank-you God" passed my lips a few dozen times in the seconds that followed.

The experience of tumbling end over end at Mach, and then ejecting out of a fireball was very surreal. It was as if God Himself reached out, placed His hands around us, and didn't let go until we were safely away from the wreckage. To this day I cannot otherwise explain how we survived.

Critical ejection seat components are installed directly behind the aft seat in the Tomcat. Our jet exploded and broke apart in flight, separating the cockpit from the rest of the aircraft, somewhere just behind where Buga was sitting. If our jet had broken apart in any other fashion, the ejection system might not have remained intact, thereby preventing our escape. There was no windblast. How did that happen? The entire event was nothing short of phenomenal.

Later I noticed "rope burns" and bruises in various places where the harness rode close to my flightsuit. I also saw how the intense fire had burned off my squadron patches and had melted the visor on my helmet. We made it out, but we both got burned. Buga's burns were much worse than mine, but he was a lot closer to the fire.

Shortly after parachute opening shock I looked down and saw a large splash in the water about 1,000 feet below me. Maybe it was the aircraft canopy, or maybe it was a big piece of Tomcat, who knows? There were pieces of our jet raining down from the sky all around us, making numerous smaller splashes in the water. I looked to my right, slightly below me, and the bulk of our disabled Tomcat was spiraling down toward the ocean. It was engulfed in flames, and many of the skin panels were missing. I could not tell the top of the aircraft from the bottom. It reminded me of a scene from Apocalypse as I watched Lion 112 "lawn-dart" vertically down toward the water.

I looked to my left, and saw Buga gently floating down underneath the canopy of his parachute. He was slightly below me. I wiggled my fingers and toes, noting that I still had all the big parts

attached, the parts I had started the day with. That was good. I then became aware of the burns I had received prior to ejecting. As I looked down and thought of the salt water, I thought, "Oh, salt water on burns is really going to hurt."

As we descended in our parachutes we watched the JPJ take a 40-degree course correction to the right and head at warp speed in our direction. That was comforting. I prepared for water entry and my training took over. I released my raft, activated the self-inflating mechanism on my life preserver, and located the parachute release fittings near the top of my harness. I always had a fear of landing in the water and having my parachute come down on top of me. I didn't want that to happen and was trying to think about how to avoid it.

With all the gear I was wearing, I plunged at least four-feet underwater after touching down. Hey, they didn't tell me about that in survival training. When I finally surfaced my raft was right next to me, and my parachute was nowhere in sight. Thank God for that.

The survival raft fits into your "seat pan" which is underneath the flat part of the ejection seat that you sit on. The seat pan attaches to the pilot via lap belts. It's about 8 inches thick and contains an emergency locator beacon, a small package of survival items, and a raft. As you could imagine, the seat pan is not large enough to store a big comfortable raft in. In fact, the raft is quite small and is only about four feet in length. For a guy who's 6'2" the survival raft is a frightfully small container that is difficult to get in and too small to be useful for any lengthy period of time.

After struggling for several seconds, I managed get into my raft face first. I was able to eventually turn over onto my back. The water was warm, maybe 80 degrees, and "Oh," I thought, "warm water means sharks." I pulled my flight boots up inside my little black raft-cocoon, but then I considered that it would be a really bad day if I survived an aircraft crash only to get eaten by a shark. Bravely, I put my feet back in the water, daring any nearby predators to swim by and chomp them off. In my divinely appointed circumstances I thought I was invincible.

Buga and I were in the water less than 10 minutes. The JPJ steamed up close and deployed a motorized boat to rescue us. We scarcely had time to use our signal flares. I got out my pencil flare and tried to shoot as many as I could before the rescue boat arrived. Buga popped his day-smoke, which created a school bus sized orange cloud to mark where we were. There wasn't much need to signal our rescuers, but it made for a few moments of entertainment while we were waiting to get picked up. By that point the burns on my face and neck had become painfully noticeable.

Buga sustained serious burns to his forearms and to his fingers. I have no idea how he managed to get into his raft or use his flares. When I first saw his fingers they looked like the outside of a snake shedding its skin.

The JPJ rescue boat went to Buga first and asked him if he was ok. He didn't realize it was a trick question, so he replied in the affirmative. They said, "Ok, wait here," and then they gunned the engine and sped off in my direction to make sure I was ok too. He should have told them he was dying or something. For a few minutes he was all alone

The rescue boat pulled me out of the water first then went back and fished Buga out, but within a few minutes we were being hoisted aboard the JPJ, rescue boat, rescuers, and all.

As we stepped out of the motorized boat, the Captain of the ship was there to greet us. I said something stupid like, "Sir, permission to come aboard." We were all so shocked at what had just transpired that everyone was awkward and a bit giddy.

Buga and I were escorted to a small medical facility, where we were treated for our burns. I pulled a soggy 20-dollar bill out of my wallet and asked if I could buy a JPJ t-shirt. Somebody ran off and returned a few minutes later with a couple of nice polo shirts and baseball caps. They wouldn't take my wet money. For many years my JPJ polo was a treasured item of my wardrobe.

Before leaving the JPJ, we were escorted to the mess decks, where a microphone was put in front of us, and we were asked to talk to the crew. I'm not sure whether or not it was protocol for being rescued out of the water, but it felt good to express our appreciation for all the crew had done on our behalf. We then followed our escorts through a series of passages and ladders that led us to the helicopter landing pad. A helicopter from the USS Lincoln had arrived, and was waiting to take us back to ship. I dreaded having to go back to the Lincoln. How could I possibly explain what had just happened? I had no clue what had happened.

When you sign your name on the dotted line and take a multi-million-dollar aircraft out, for some reason they expect you to bring it back in generally the same condition it was in when you took it. If and when you don't come back with your jet, you are put through a grueling question and answer process where you are thoroughly sifted. If you trash your jet, and it's your fault, sometimes they don't ever let you fly again. What could I say to the Mishap Board? I had no idea what had happened, or why.

Our 20-minute ride back to the Lincoln was a quiet and reflective journey. The pilots in the front of the helicopter kept turning their head to look at us. It was as if they knew we had screwed up royally, and they were reluctantly transporting us to our trial and punishment. We may as well have been our way to our execution. They probably were just curious as to what had happened, but it felt like they were boring holes through us with their icy stares.

We arrived back overhead the USS Lincoln, and the Air Boss directed our helicopter into a holding pattern on the right side of the ship. We watched out the window as our fellow aircrew landed, one by one. This was the same group that we had launched with an hour-and-a-half

earlier. After the last fixed wing aircraft recovered, our helo was directed to land. Although we left behind our \$36 million fighter, at least we made our briefed recovery time. So one thing went right on that mission. We weren't late for our recover.

Stepping off the helicopter, I ran into my Commanding Officer. He was escorted by two of my roommates, and they were waiting near the helo on the flight deck. "Skipper, I'm sorry I didn't bring the jet back." "No, I'm not sure what happened." By that point I knew there was nothing I could have physically done to cause the fire we experienced. I also knew that I had done nothing wrong, and I wasn't going to apologize more than once. I'd seen guys return to the ship after losing a jet, and you could always tell within a few seconds whether it was their fault or not. The guilty ones apologized over and over again. That wasn't me.

My Skipper ordered me to lay down on a stretcher, which I staunchly refused to do. He didn't back down, and after a short but heated discussion I gave in.

In the ship's hospital Buga and I were stripped of our clothing, handed flimsy hospital gowns that didn't close in the back, and were x-rayed from every possible angle. Wouldn't you know it, we had hardly anything to wear, and we were in Medical, the one place on the ship where the air conditioning worked really good. Maybe that was the first part of the punishment package.

At one point a phone was pushed in my face, and my wife's soothing voice was on the other end. It was 3:00 AM in San Diego, and she had received "the call." I had told her that if she got a phone call it was good news, and I'd see her again, but if a car pulled up in front of the house it was bad news, and I wasn't coming home. Susie was a seasoned Navy wife, and although she was concerned she knew the drill. I downplayed my injuries and we had a nice long conversation. She didn't sleep a wink for the rest of that night.

The Mishap Board was assembled by the time we finished getting checked out in Medical. We were provided clean dry clothes, and we took our separate turns at the far end of the gray table as they grilled us over and over again. The Mishap Board totally wringed us out, and then they grilled us some more. Having been an investigator twice previously I knew exactly how it was going to work.

By the end of the following day the mishap board was in possession of a videotape that clearly showed the sequence of events. The tape seemed to spark their interest, and the board kept at us, going over our stories, asking more questions, and trying to get more information. It wasn't until the next day that the board finally relented and let me see the tape of our crash.

The videotape showed us going by the JPJ at the speed of sound (around 620 mph). Shortly after passing the ship there was a small puff of black smoke that appeared to exit the left side of the aircraft. A second later our jet went from 1/2 inch tall on the TV screen to a fireball 20 times that size. It instantly detonated, just like the Space Shuttle Challenger. Out of the fireball, two

large pieces of burning wreckage emerged, and each was encompassed in a ball of flame. The smaller ball is probably the forward fuselage and cockpit, the larger ball everything else. For the next 30 seconds large pieces of jet, including panels, pieces, and unidentifiable junk rain down.

As the camera zooms in it picks up two small parachutes, which emerge below and ahead of where the large fireball blossomed.

Seeing the video was shocking. I had no idea how dramatic the event really was. After the board let me watch the tape, their questions ended. It was depressing, as if I had been discarded, or something. I was left alone to recover from my injuries.

The mishap board speculated as to a mechanical cause of some sort, but nobody will ever really know what happened. Lion 112 buried itself in 17,000 feet of water, taking its secrets with it to the bottom of the ocean. My personal opinion is that a panel came loose from the aircraft, punctured through one of the engines, and started a cataclysmic chain of events that quickly led to the jet exploding.

Buga's injuries were severe enough that he was shipped off to a hospital in Guam. We didn't see him again for a few weeks, but we heard stories, probably lies, about him being waited on by a herd of beautiful nurses. His humor remained intact, and for many months he enjoyed showing off his burns to those who would take notice. I think it got him many free drinks in the bars in San Diego. I don't see Buga very often these days, but he's a hero in my book.

Within a few weeks my burns were in the process of healing and I was back up in the air again. My first few flights were tentative at best. Anytime I got near the ground with any bit of speed, I had a feeling that I was going to tumble wildly out of control. It never happened, but the feeling I got from the effects of the crash took several years to wear off, and I didn't completely overcome them until the year I was an Airshow Demonstration Pilot in the F/A-18 Hornet. After that experience I was finally back to normal, whatever that is.

IRAQI MIG-23 CRASH (JAN 1999)

On the 5th of January 1999, I launched in a VFA-97 F/A-18A from the deck of the USS Vinson, in support of an Operation Southern Watch mission. My assigned task that day was to fly wing on another F/A-18 while patrolling the Southern No Fly Zone (NFZ). We were briefed that if we detected any Iraqi fighter aircraft south of the No Fly Zone line, we would be cleared to shoot them down. The likelihood of such an engagement was low, but if it ever happened it would be a fighter pilot's dream mission.

Truth be known, there were only occasional incidents of Iraqi excursion into the fabled NFZ airspace. U.S. fighters were merciless at patrolling the NFZ, and there is no doubt that it was well known that if you were caught south of the border in an Iraqi jet, it was not going to go well for you. That was enough to keep them out of the off limits airspace.

The day started out uneventfully. The brief went normal. I sat in the back of the room and listened as the F-14 lead pilot, "Bluto," briefed the group on how he and his wingman were going to execute a supersonic ingress to their combat air patrol (CAP) point. They were going to orbit on CAP for a very short period of time, then depart station for the tanker to get their allotted airborne gas.

I was the designated "on deck super spare" for the flight, meaning that both a "go bird" and an "airborne spare" would have to abort before I could be launched. In other words, I had almost zero chance of being launched on the mission. As things often turn out, a couple of "go" birds went down, and the "airborne spare" had a radar issue that kept him from proceeding on the mission. As a result, I found myself quickly upgraded to a "go" position, and the next thing I knew I was airborne and was joining up on the wing of a VFA-22 F/A-18C piloted by "Drac."

I was in a VFA-97 F/A-18A that day, and my mighty A model was loaded with two AIM-7 Sparrows and two AIM-9M Sidewinders. Drac, on the other hand, was lucky enough to have a couple of AMRAAMs and Sidewinders on his C model. We joined up overhead the Vinson and proceeded North to our designated tanker rendezvous station, in order to get some needed gas.

After topping off the fuel tanks on the tanker, we pushed north into Iraq and headed toward our briefed CAP.

Shortly after leaving the tanker we were passed code words that indicated that a MiG-25 Foxbat and a MiG-23 Flogger were airborne. Shortly after that we were vectored on a course to intercept the Flogger. The offending Iraqi fighter was south of the No Fly Zone line, and that made him legal game in our world.

Drac lit the burners and smartly accelerated our formation. I followed suit and deployed out to combat spread on his right side.

At this precise moment the Blacklion F-14's were about 70 miles out in front of us and well off to our East. Shortly after we took our vector toward the MiG-23 the Tomcats turned cold and headed back toward their CAP point. We found out later that they had launched two AIM-54 Phoenix missiles on an Iraqi fighter. Little did they know that the AIM-54s had failed to work.

As Drac and I vectored downrange we had great coverage from our airborne intercept controller (AIC), but we wanted to make sure we didn't get tagged by a low aircraft that our controller might not have picked up. It was a known tactic of some air forces to deploy a high fighter as bait and a low fighter that would try to achieve an unobserved entry and a kill, and Drac and I were "eyeballs out," visually clearing the formation from any interlopers.

Our AIC controller continued to transmit vectors to our MiG-23 target, however they switched to secure voice so that their communications couldn't be monitored by the enemy. Things were going very well, and it was beginning to look like one of us might actually get to shoot our long range missile.

As we continued downrange I was concerned that I would not have an opportunity to fire my AIM-7, because Drac was carrying the longer-range AMRAAM. He was in the lead, and I knew he would take a long range shot and would turn away from the MiG just about the time I was getting ready to launch my Sparrow.

The only way I was going to have a chance of getting a kill that day was if I took my shot and followed my Sparrow all the way in to the target---and hope like heck that Drac's missile missed.

Most fighter pilots never get the chance to even take a single shot at a MiG, and on this particular day I had made up my mind that I was going to do whatever it took to increase my chances of getting a kill. I wondered what kind of trouble I might get into if I detached from Drac as he turned cold, but I figured that if I brought back HUD tape of a MiG blowing up, everything else would take care of itself. I didn't care if I got in trouble, I was going to take it all the way into the merge if it went that far.

When we hit 90 miles I reduced my radar scan volume and centered it up on the datalink track. Unfortunately, at 70 miles, and only a couple of minutes from shooting our missiles, our ill-fated MiG turned cold and raced back north toward the NFZ boundary. When it became apparent that we couldn't run him down, Drac turned the section cold, and we headed south back toward our CAP station, hoping that the MiG would come back out to play, but he and his friends all stayed safely on their side of the line.

After we got back to the ship we learned a bit more about the Phoenix shots. We also found out that a MiG-23 that crashed during the time that we were airborne. A lot of folks incorrectly associated the MiG crash with the Phoenix shots, and it wasn't until later that same day that we

learned that the rocket motors on the AIM-54's didn't fire due to a mistake by one of the arming crews on the aircraft carrier. Too bad. That would have been a great day for the Blacklions and a great day for the F-14 Tomcat to get another MiG-23 kill.

We also heard that a MiG-23 ran out of gas on its way back to its home field. We can't say for certain that it was the same MiG that Drac and I were chasing, but I like to think that it was. Personally, I think we scared the guy and he left his afterburner engaged too long as he ran away, and then he ran out of gas. All I know is that a MiG ran away from a section of CVW-11 aircraft, and then it crashed on its way back to its field. Someone in our flight played a role in that incident, and as a result the Iraqi Air Force was deprived of one of their few operable fighters. In my book that's a kill, and "a kill's a kill."

The following day I flew another OSW mission over Iraq, but it was extraordinarily quiet. After the Iraqi Air Force lost their MiG-23 the day prior, they took a day off from flying. Nobody got airborne on their side of the line that day, and it was one of the most boring flights I ever went on.

F-14 TAILHOOK FAILURE (NOV 2001)

TBD

STIFFLER'S CRASH (FEB 2003)

According to statistics compiled by the Naval Safety Center, the majority of aircraft mishaps are caused by human error. Human error is virtually unavoidable in the flying business. Every year the aircraft and the procedures for maintaining them seems to get better. However, the one statistic that seems nearly impossible to reduce is the number of mishaps caused by basic human stupidity.

Depending on how you look at them, mistakes can be grouped into a variety of categories. There are intentional and unintentional mistakes. There are also perception errors, judgment errors, improper supervision, lack of supervision, incorrect decisions, lack of information upon which to base a decision, lack of skill, transposition of skills, and the list goes on and on.

Squadron Operations Departments are notoriously efficient at managing struggling aviators who fail to achieve required performance wickets. A variety of techniques are used to assist below-average aviators to catch up with their peer group. At times, significant squadron resources are expended, working on improving the performance of below average pilots. In my last squadron we had such a pilot. We managed him the best we knew how, but what we did wasn't enough.

"Stiffler" was an enthusiastic young JO. His hard work in his ground job earned him the respect of those he worked for and amply demonstrated his above average intelligence. If there was a difficult project that needed to be quickly accomplished, Stiffler was the guy who would get the job done. Unfortunately, his excellent accomplishments on the ground did not translate into acceptable performance in the air.

One of the most challenging phases of JO training is the basic fighter maneuvering (BFM) syllabus. This phase consists of a series of flights that acquaint a junior pilot with flying the F/A-18 through a series of three dimensional maneuvers, while simultaneously attempting to employ simulated weapons on an equally matched opponent---or attempting to avoid being shot, as the case may be.

In February of 2003 I was assigned to lead Stiffler out on an Offensive BFM flight. It was a syllabus flight he had previously attempted twice and failed. The flight involved a set of canned maneuvers, where he started in a position that was basically behind my aircraft. His job was to stay behind me through a series of pre-briefed turns and to shoot as many simulated weapons at my aircraft as he was able. My job was to try to survive without getting shot.

It was a bright clear day when we manned up our jets and prepared for launch. We were flying from the USS Vinson, which was stationed in the vicinity of Guam, and our assigned training area was approximately 50 miles northeast of the ship. Stiffler and I joined up 20 miles from the ship and proceeded outbound to our station, completing fuel transfer and maneuvering checklists enroute.

We completed our checks and set up for the first maneuvering set. We did a series of check-turns, which placed his aircraft half way between my left 9:00 position and directly aft on my tail. We both started an easy turn to the left, and the maneuvering began when the nose of his aircraft was pointed directly at mine.

As briefed, I initiated a hard "break turn" into Stiffler's aircraft, while he lagged to a position aft of my jet, easily staying behind me. As his nose began to come back on my jet, I initiated a nose-low turn that took me straight down toward the ocean, pulling back up to the horizon to level off. I watched Stiffler as he made his first error, which was that he did not fly to a lag position, as briefed. The distance between our aircraft began to close.

I then initiated a second nose low turn and watched as he mistakenly positioned his aircraft to fly below me and out in front of me. For a second I became concerned that he was either going to hit me or have a very close miss, but he pulled off to my right and went whizzing by, overshooting both my altitude and my flight path by a couple thousand feet.

For all practical purposes, the maneuvering set was over, the training objectives had been accomplished, and I could have ended the exercise right then. It was my error not to. But I wanted to emphasize the mistake that Stiffler made and bring back some gunsight footage for him to watch in the debrief. I pulled down and right, hard into Stiffler, selected the gun, and I depressed the gun trigger.

After hundreds and hundreds of BFM flights I learned a universal rule, which is that a young and inexperienced pilot usually returns from a flight thinking that they performed much better than they actually did. On every training flight a tape is carried in a recorder and can be used to record the heads up display (HUD). It injects a dose of reality into the debrief and keeps everyone more honest regarding their personal performance appraisal. When you show a young guy footage of your gun raking his jet, he quickly reevaluates his otherwise lofty appraisal of his own performance. Sometimes that is exactly what is needed in order to get them to admit they made a mistake.

As Stiffler watched me convert to an offensive position behind him, he attempted to turn hard back towards me and salvage the reversal of roles. Unfortunately, the laws of physics and aerodynamics made his intended maneuver impossible. In short, he asked his aircraft for a harder turn than it was capable of giving him, but he tried anyway.

Immediately Stiffler tumbled out of control in a rolling departure to the right, opposite the direction he intended. At the time I was not unduly concerned. There was plenty of sky beneath us, and his departure from controlled flight was not as dramatic as I had personally seen or experienced.

As Stiffler's Hornet continued to roll right, the nose of his aircraft scribed a rolling arc around the apparent flight path of the aircraft. I made a call to "neutralize the controls" which was not very stellar on my part. The first step to recover an out-of-control Hornet is to release the controls, which is the call I should have made. Believe it or not, the F/A-18 flies out of this kind of a situation better without the pilot's intervention, and 99% of the time if you just let go of the controls the jet will recover on its own. That's the magic of flying a digital jet.

I watched with concern as Stiffler's jet continued its downhill spiral toward the water, still out of control. As he passed through around 6,000 I became anxious, and for a moment I thought I was going to see him ride the aircraft into the water. Then at about 2,000 feet he depressed the transmit button on his radio and exclaimed, "I'm out, (pause) I'm out I'm out."

Within a second I watched as the scene transitioned to slow motion. First the canopy came off, then a pinpoint of bright light pushed his ejection seat directly up and away from the aircraft with an incredible burst of speed. A short moment later I watched a white parachute blossom, in front of and below my aircraft. After that I observed as he drifted slowly down toward the water.

Right as Stiffler left the cockpit of his jet, his aircraft immediately stopped rolling, it leveled its wings, and it pitched nose down toward the clear, blue ocean. It flew beautifully straight and entered the water approximately 60 degrees nose low, wings level to the horizon. Apparently the plane knew how to recover from being out of control, but it was not allowed to do so until Stiffler had been taken out of the equation. The one thing Stiffler had apparently not done was to let go of the controls. He was still trying to fly the airplane, and was thereby preventing it from recovering.

The splash of the Hornet was sickening. As the jet entered the sea a perfectly pristine F/A-18 Hornet was turned from a sleek sophisticated fighter into a soggy bundle of unusable trash in less time than it takes to sneeze. But thank God Stiffler pulled the ejection handle when he did. He probably had three or four seconds to spare, at the most.

The instant I saw the splash I looked to my right to find my helmet bag. It was sitting on the right side of my ejection seat, where it always was. I instinctively reached up for the attachment point on the right side of my oxygen mask and looked to ensure my helmet bag was unzipped. I thought I was going to throw up and I needed a place to do it.

This was the second time I'd personally watched a jet hit the water, and it wasn't any easier the second time around.

The feeling of sickness quickly passed, and I switched to the ship's Tower frequency and requested a SAR (search and rescue) helicopter be vectored in Stiffler's direction. An EA-6B Prowler arrived to assist in guiding the helicopter towards Stiffler. After they found him I raced to

get back to “mom,” which is what we called the ship. It’s not a good feeling to return to the ship without your wingman.

In the aftermath we determined that Stiffler had flown his aircraft into a departure and put it out of control. He then continued to put in control inputs that prevented the aircraft from recovering, which means that he basically held the stick in a location where the aircraft was prevented from flying. As soon as he let go of the stick, the aircraft started flying again.

During the investigation a Field Naval Aviator Evaluation Board (FNAEB, pronounced *fee-nab*) was convened. Their job was to determine whether or not Stiffler should be allowed to fly again. The board recommended Stiffler continue flying with some minor retraining, but every endorser in the entire chain of command, myself included, recommend that he transition to an alternate career path. The final result was that his flying career ended. It was sad, but he wasn’t performing in the cockpit to the level of his peer group, and he needed to go do something else. Because he was an excellent officer and a hard worker, Stiffler was transitioned into a career path, where he excelled.

As I look back on his crash I can’t help but to think that, number one it was avoidable and Stiffler should have been identified earlier as someone who should not be flying the Hornet, and two we were lucky he survived his crash to go on and have a full Navy career. Tons of below average pilots don’t survive their crashes, but I am thankful Stiffler is still with us today.

THE AFTERMATH

The Navy can be coldly uncaring and thorough in how it goes about its investigating into the loss of a multi-million-dollar asset, but flying fighters a high stakes profession, and lives and millions of dollars worth of equipment hang in the balance.

Mishap investigations have to be thorough, and the investigators who are assigned to sift through the wreckage need to be able to pass on the valuable lessons that they learn, so that others can learn from the mistakes that were made.

In 20 years of flying I observed great pilots make minor errors leading to the loss of an aircraft, and I've seen terrible pilots make huge errors and get away with that time after time. I've watched guys survive that I was certain were going to kill themselves, and I've attended memorial services for great pilots who should have lived. Tragedy seemed to strike randomly, and nobody was completely immune.

The fact of the matter is that fighter pilots get paid to make thousands of split-second decisions, right and wrong, on every flight, with their life and the safety of their aircraft hanging in the balance. They do that day after day, on hundreds of flights, and on most days they do everything exactly right. Sometimes a jet is lost in the process, and that's the cost of having a military that's capable of deploying anywhere on the planet in order to defend Americans and American interests. That's the cost of freedom.

I only know that every man and woman that volunteers to fly military aircraft has my deepest respect and gratitude. They go out and put themselves in harm's way on a daily basis so that old retired guys like me can live a quiet and peaceful life, unconcerned about what is going on in the rest of the world. And those who are flying military aircraft overseas right now, at this very instant, have my deepest respect and appreciation.



MARTIN BAKER TIE CLUB

Once upon a time I used to say, “Martin Baker gives you a tie after you eject, but only if you live!” It’s a harsh reality, but I knew a lot of aircrew who ejected and didn’t make it back to claim their tie. It’s a real tragedy to take an ejection seat on a rocket ride and not survive to tell the story.

The MB seat is a great ejection seat, but it’s not a magical device. It’s definitely not a video game reset button. There are laws of physics and gravity that even the incredible MB engineers can’t overcome.

I was a witness to that when Kara Hultgreen ejected out of her stricken Tomcat at only 60’ above the water (ejection was initiated by her RIO). Her aircraft had rolled most of the way over, and the seat left the aircraft with a trajectory of a 45-degree downward angle. Unfortunately, the laws of physics and gravity were not in her favor that day, and her seat didn’t have enough time to work.

An ejection seat accelerates from zero to somewhere around 180 MPH in the blink of an eye. During Kara’s mishap her ejection seat was going through its sequence of functions, working exactly as it should. However, there just wasn’t enough time or altitude for it to complete its sequence and give her an open parachute. Kara died by the scantest of margins. If she had been ejected a half second earlier, it is likely she would have lived.

Shortly after Buga and I ejected out of our Tomcat I sent a letter to MB asking them how to sign up for the tie. They sent me a package that included a certificate, some company trinkets, and the coveted MB tie.

This is the text from the letter MB sent me:

Dear Commander Jennings,

Thank you for your enquiry.

To date Martin-Baker Seats have saved 7,216 Aircrew lives worldwide.

Your Tie Club Number is 4,804, however you were the 6,476th recorded life saved, your RIO T.J. Gusewelle is Tie Club number 4,803 and the 6,475th recorded life saved.

The reason for the difference in the Tie Club and Lives Saved numbers is that the Tie Club was not formed until some considerable time after the first life was saved.

Kind Regards

Eric L Thomas (Secretary Tie Club)
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email :- ethomas@martin-baker.co.uk



A few years after my ejection I found myself in Saudi Arabia on a one-month assignment to the Command Air Operations Center at Prince Sultan Air Base. On the base there was a vendor who could make a patch of anything you could think of. So I sketched out a picture of a MB ejection seat with some words around the outside, and I handed my design to the store owner. The patch on the left is what he came up with. I bought several of them, and this particular patch was proudly worn on the back of my flight jacket for years. I still love that patch today. Martin Baker bought me 20 extra years of life, more than I would have had otherwise, and I am thankful that they make fantastic ejection seats.

SLIPPING THE SURLY BONDS

A poem that is well known in aviation starts with a phrase about “slipping the surly bonds of earth.” If you’re not sure what surly means, I wasn’t either, and I had to look it up. It means *bad-tempered and unfriendly*.

The earth can be bad-tempered and unfriendly at times, and slipping the surly bonds means getting the heck off the ground where there is an unfriendly existence. That’s almost like what happens when you get on an American Airlines airplane and fly from Fresno to Phoenix, right? That’s a trick question, and the answer is no. When you load into an over-crowded aluminum tube, herded aboard like cattle, and sit in cramped quarters with dozens of your not-so-besties, you don’t get very far from the bad-tempered and unfriendly people that the surly bonds poem is talking about.

The expression *slipping the surly bonds of earth* brings to mind more of a solo journey. It’s reminds us of the peaceful experience of flight. Sometimes the pilot doesn’t know where they are going, or maybe how the journey is going to turn out. They just know that there is an unbelievable feeling that they get when they soar aloft, and as they watch farms and houses turn into little dots that become smudges on a canvas of green and brown they leave all their worldly cares behind.

The peacefulness and beauty of flying was one of the things that drew me into Naval Aviation, and it helped keep me in the Navy for 20 years. Once I experienced flying, it was like a drug I couldn’t give up, and when it was finally over it was like cutting off one of my limbs and tossing it down into a ravine where I could see it sitting down there, but I couldn’t get to it anymore.

The surly bonds line is in the poem *High Flight*, which was penned by John Gillespie Magee, Jr in 1941. He was a young aviator and poet, and he died in a mid-air collision over Britain in 1941, not long after he wrote *High Flight*.

High Flight

"Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared
and swung

High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...

Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace.
Where never lark, or even eagle flew —

And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
- Put out my hand, and touched the face of God."

Gillespie Magee, Jr.

John was born in China, from a British Mother and an American Father---who were missionaries at the time---and it's interesting to know that he served in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).

I'm not sure such a feat would be possible today, given a pedigree that included parents from both America and the U.K.

I'm not completely clear where the original version of *High Flight* was written, or if it even exists today, but a copy of *High Flight* was scrawled on the back of the envelope of a letter that John sent to his parents after he wrote the poem. Sometime after his death John's father reprinted his poem in church publications, and through those initial efforts *High Flight* eventually became widely known.

I've been to a dozen memorial services for fallen aviators where John Magee's poem was read. When I read or hear his words today it reminds me of the cherished friends I've lost in aircraft mishaps, and of the memorial services I've been to that marked their passing.

It is strange and somewhat poignant that a poem that many aviators have grown to love was written by a young soul who died all the way way back in 1941, and who gave up his life before he even reached the age of 20 years old. I think it would have been amazing to know him, and that he would have fit in well with any group of aviators today. Pilots have not changed. They are basically the same now as they were 60 years ago.

At the time of John's death, he was flying the incomparable Supermarine Spitfire, arguably the highest performance military aircraft of its day. That's very cool. He was only 19 years old, and he was at the pinnacle of aviation for his day.

Although the poem is essentially about the ecstasy of flight, *slipping the surly bonds* means something slightly different to me at this point in my life. Where I am today, *slipping the surly bonds* is reminiscent of the possibility of flying away from the cares and concerns of a grumpy planet, where jobs, bills, possessions, politics, health issues, relationship issues, human wreckage, and a host of other worries exist.

Please don't misunderstand, if I had the choice I would 100% choose to live and put up with all that "stuff." Were it my personal choice, I would grow to be an old man, watch my children's lives unfold, help them along the way, know, hold, and love my grandchildren, embrace them in my arms, and stay beside Susie while growing old with her. However, since I am completely powerless to choose how the future turns out, I fully accept that *slipping the bonds* of a challenging life, and then falling into the arms of my Lord in heaven, is a pretty amazing and wonderful way to go.

If you weren't apprised of my situation, I was diagnosed with Stage III NHL in early 2015, and the cancer has grown far too quickly for how I would have liked it to turn out. I wish things were different, but I have no regrets about life. It is what it is, and I have had an amazing time here with some fantastic family and friends that have made it all worthwhile. (Thanks Susie, you made it so wonderful!)

Usually we don't get to know when or how we're going to die, but if we're very lucky we might get a couple of small insights into that, and if we're purposeful with what we do with those insights, they will allow us to do some planning on behalf of our families, and maybe even to write a short book.

If it weren't for the NHL, and if it were not for the quick progression of the cancer, I definitely would not have written this book. So I thank God for how things turned out from that perspective. I had so much left that I wanted to say, and not enough time to say it, but some of those words are definitely in here, and I am thankful I had a chance to write them down.

Distilling the title of this book down to its base form, *Slipping the Bonds* means to me that I have another plan and an alternate destination on my flight plan. Life is short and sweet, and eternity is so very long, that if you don't have a plan you may miss the opportunity to spend forever in an amazing place, in the presence of your God and Creator, and with friends, and family, and acquaintances, and with millions of amazing people that you haven't even met yet. Who doesn't want that?

Who doesn't want to know where they came from and why they were created? Who doesn't want to meet the God who lovingly knitted them together in their mother's womb? (Psalm 139:3).

God loves us so much, and he wants us to be with him for eternity, but we have to choose him. He won't force us or make us be on his team. We have to take a deliberative step in his direction, and we have to keep pursuing him during the few short days that we are here. That's what I've done, and I don't want to go, but if I absolutely have to go home, I am ready.

If you are reading this, I hope that I will see you in heaven, and that I will be with you for an eternity that will be amazing. The Bible says that there is a wide chasm that separates heaven from hell and no one can cross it. (Luke 16:26). You and I will either be in one place or the other, heaven or hell, but it is truly my hope that you and I will both be with our God, forever.

Thanks for taking the time to read this book. I love you, and I look forward to seeing you again soon!

Neil

AFTERTHOUGHT

I've done a million things that most fighter pilots have done, and from that perspective my story is nothing special, but we each have our own unique story to tell, and this one is mine.

I've piloted Navy fighters in good weather and bad, soaring aloft from luxuriously long paved runways, and being forcibly jettisoned from the harsh steel decks of Navy aircraft carriers. I've landed back on runways so long as to not even need brakes to slow down, and I've slammed into the arresting gear wires on ships, where the landing area was so small as to defy logic.

I've watched St Elmo's Fire dance off the windscreen while climbing aloft through storm clouds, and I've been inside clouds that were so thick that I had to nearly touch my aircraft to my flight lead's, just to maintain sight.

I've spent years away from home on training detachments to various places, and I've lived years at sea, where my squadronmates and I counted the days from port stop to port stop, hoping that time could pass more quickly than it would. Time at sea always slowed considerably while days at home passed in just a blink.

I've pitted aerodynamics against gravity as I pulled my fighter skyward, pointing straight up while pulling the throttles to idle, trying to balance perfectly so that my jet would slide straight back for hundreds of feet before pitching over in one direction or the other and lawn darting back toward earth.

I've aimed the pointy nose at massive clouds, accelerating to 500 knots and waiting until the last possible second before pulling up, missing the side of the cloud by a few feet while climbing up its face. I've raced up and down the sides of clouds, rolling inverted over the top, pulling the stick back, and loading the jet up to seven times the force of gravity as I followed the contour of the top of the cloud. Over and over again I've bent my airplanes around clouds in all directions, climbing, descending, diving, and maneuvering like a roller coaster in the sky, pitching, turning, and rolling according to the whim of the moment.

I've been hurtled off the catapult on the darkest nights, with only the instruments to tell me where sky and water intersected, climbing away from the unforgiving sea in full afterburner, too scared to pull the throttles back, but doing so anyway because I had precious little extra fuel to waste.

I've climbed to 40,000 feet on the blackest nights, looking skyward at the Milky Way, seeing millions of stars and watching with my night vision goggles as lonely satellites passed overhead, reflecting the rays of the sun from hundreds of miles above the earth. At those moments I've been in awe of God and his creation, wondering why he created our earth, which is but a speck in a universe of 100 billion galaxies.

I've watched thousands of bombs explode in war, with bright flashes of light, as targets were destroyed in desert towns and in places I couldn't even name. I've seen arches of reddish orange light rise up from the ground below, curving gracefully back down to the earth, as anti-aircraft artillery guns were employed in the hope of forcing my fighter out of the sky. I've seen a dozen surface-to-air missiles angrily race skyward while our enemies unsuccessfully tried to take my life.

I've steered my fighter toward Navy ships on dark stormy nights when the aft end of the landing area was moving up and down 20 feet, and rolling, pitching, and heaving, while I attempted to aim for a point in space only 2 feet high and plus or minus 5 feet wide. More than 900 times I've landed on aircraft carriers, in all kinds of conditions, and in all types of weather, many times not even seeing the ship until seconds before touching down.

Thousands of times I've shot simulated air-to-air missiles in training. A dozen times I've shot live missiles, some of which cost taxpayers more than a million dollars just for a single pull of my trigger. On one particularly memorable day I shot a Sidewinder missile that blew a drone out of

the sky, watching with fascination as fiery wreckage tumbled end over end before falling to the ocean in flames.



Training for war I've strafed tanks with 20mm high explosive incendiary ammunition, watching the bullets angrily pepper a target at the rate of 100 per second. I've dropped thousands of simulated bombs and real bombs on U.S. training ranges and in the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan, using systems that were so precise that miss distances were measured by only a few feet.

I've led strike packages of 20 aircraft on missions to destroy enemy targets,

taking out buildings and other "aim points," according to tasking that was passed down from above.

I've joined up on and escorted Russian jet fighters off Cam Rahn Bay, easily staying inside their turn as I followed them through a series of evasive maneuvers. My flight lead and I once chased a MiG in Iraq, and we had clearance to fire, but it turned back north just in time, mere seconds before we released our air-to-air missiles to go after it.

I've flown my fighter by crowds of thousands, unable to hear their cheers as I flew past upside down, and it felt like I was taking candy from a baby to be able to break all the normal rules while operating within the wonderful boundaries of what they let you do as an airshow pilot.

I once watched a good friend die in front of me when they ejected a second too late from their doomed fighter. I've also watched other friends eject out and live. I've been to dozens of memorial services, and although I used to keep count I no longer recall how many good friends I've lost.

And when family and friends celebrate a holiday that they don't fully understand, I like to sit in a quiet place for a time, thinking about all the good friends that I lost, the sacrifices that they made, and what their lives and their passing means to me.

I've done a thousand things that reasonable people would never do. I've spent sleepless nights on ships at sea while family and friends slept quietly in warm beds at home. I've sweated puddles while sitting in the sun strapped into fighters for hours on end, ready to launch at a moment's notice in order to be able to intercept enemy aircraft that were hundreds of miles away. Like my peers, I risked my life for my country, without reservation, willing to give it up on a moment's notice knowing that I was serving a cause that was much bigger than myself.

Most people cannot fathom the idea of risking their life for anyone or anything else, but when I was young my mates and I did exactly that, thousands of times, knowing that it was worth it.

And now that I am old I want to say that my life mattered, that I made a difference. I want to go outside and shout as loud as I can, that I was here, that I did something meaningful, and that I was once somebody. But even if I did my cries would be unheard, because life is about the young, and it is about those who have the energy and drive to live to it's very edge. I was once young, but now I am not.

The end of all things is that life is for the living, and soon I will pass, and my name will not even be a whisper on the wind, and nobody will remember who I was or what I did, and that will be good. That is how life should be, and I embrace the opportunity to fade into obscurity.

A few short years from now our planet will be populated with a completely new set of people, and it will be their turn to do things that matter to their generation. And for those of us who have passed on, our life will add up to only one thing: Did we or did we not accept Christ while we were here, and did we influence others to do the same?

From the day we are born we are all dying, some of us faster than others, but none of us will live forever, and after our generation has passed, almost nothing that we did will matter.

The earth is our temporary dwelling place, and we are just passing through. We are here for a short time, and then we move on. This is not our home. Our home is somewhere in eternity.

The sum of eternity, if it could even be counted, would be more than 10 million billion trillion life times. It is so long that none of us can comprehend its vastness. And in that context, life is but a breath, a mist, a moment in time. All of us are heading toward eternity, and we will all be there soon.

Our ultimate destination will either be with God in heaven or without him in hell. Forever. Hopefully each of us keeps this in mind as we traverse through our short but glorious days on this surly planet.