

# Positively Speaking

By Mark Wilson

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## Long Term

On September 6, 1965, Admiral James Stockdale's A-4 Skyhawk was shot down over Vietnam. The injured Stockdale found himself captured and imprisoned in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton", where he was a prisoner of war for over seven years. He was the highest ranking naval officer held as a prisoner of war in the Vietnam War.

Stockdale was kept in solitary confinement for four years, placed in leg irons for two years, denied medical care and malnourished. Despite these terrible conditions, he led an "underground resistance movement" which brought hope and a sense of esprit de corps to his fellow POW's. Still, many prisoners died under these grueling circumstances. Finally, in 1973, the brave admiral was released, and awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1976 by President Ford.

Several years later, author and researcher, Jim Collins, interviewed Stockdale in the campus of Stanford University, and asked the decorated officer how he coped with the demoralizing effects of his imprisonment.

Stockdale replied, "I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted that not only would I get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

Then, Collins asked, "Who didn't make it out?"

"Oh, that's easy," Stockdale responded, "The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

Now, I certainly believe in optimism. The title of my newspaper column, "Positively Speaking", speaks to that. However, I believe Stockdale was right.

A misplaced, short term optimism can lead to failure and disillusionment. It's much better to focus on the long term:

Somehow  
Some day  
Some way  
I'm going to make it.

Hayward Wesleyan Church

10655 State Rd. 77 · Hayward, WI 54843

Phone: 715-634-4613 · Fax: 715-634-7823 · Website: [www.haywardwesleyan.org](http://www.haywardwesleyan.org)

# *Positively Speaking*



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Things may not go as I've expected or desired, but I'm not going to let a few temporary setbacks keep me from my ultimate destiny. Rarely, does a person follow a straight path from success to success. Usually, there's quite a winding road, replete with failures, frustrations, shortcomings, and disappointments.

The important thing is to keep plugging on, regardless of the short term circumstance. Eventually, you'll find your way.

Success is getting up one more time than you fall down.

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