

# Foreword

**Bill Owens**  
**Governor of Colorado, 1999–2007**

Jim Hall has been my friend, mentor and hero for more than 30 years—and from the first time I met him I knew I was in the presence of an American patriot, the “Greatest Generation” personified.

Without Jim Hall, I would not have been Governor of Colorado; and without Jim Hall and heroes like him, our country would not be the shining beacon of hope and liberty it remains today.

I first met Jim in the 1970’s shortly after I moved to Colorado. I was a young businessman and father wanting to participate in the public policy debate.

He was a Colonel in the Colorado Air National Guard; his wife—Georgann—was a Republican activist. It was through Georgann that Jim and I soon became the best of friends.

Since Jim was in the military, he was limited from working in politics, but—from the sidelines—he was a constant source of advice and counsel as I moved up the ladder in state government. And later, after his retirement as a General in the Colorado Air Guard, Jim’s assistance was both much needed and dramatically effective, as I moved from State Representative to State Senator to Treasurer and, finally, to Governor.

I could not have done this without Jim and Georgann by my side. They advised me on issues, strategy, personalities and policies, all the while doing the tough work of organizing, building and



cajoling through hundreds of meetings, conventions, assemblies and caucuses.

What Jim, as a close personal advisor, gave to me *most* however, was a maturity and common sense, which he had in deep reservoir, filled as it was by a lifetime of experiences and drama often requiring great courage.

It was during my long-shot, 1998 race for Colorado Governor that the idea of this book emerged. Jim helped me during the early days of that campaign not only as a friend and mentor, but also as my volunteer driver, helping me get to Colorado's 63 counties, across its mountain passes and lonely plains. He would drive while I would work next to him, preparing speeches, reading research and making calls to the next town on our itinerary.

Often, after the last event of the day, as we'd be heading back to our homes in Aurora, Colorado, I would ask Jim about his amazing life—sometimes about B-29's over Japan, or training U-2 pilots to eject, or Chuck Yeager or his experiences with Che and Castro—his time in Hollywood—the list and stories would go on and on.

Jim would never tell these stories unprompted, but would reminisce upon request as the time and the miles passed by.

I then suggested—way back in 1998—that Jim write a book—a memoir—outlining his life through the stories which tie together so much of America's history of these last 60 years.

And even after my upset victory in 1998, I kept encouraging him to write his book. He'd drop by my office in the Capitol, or stop by the Executive Residence and the first thing I'd ask him was . . . "How's the book coming?"

In 2006, he contracted MRSA, a potentially fatal "staph" infection while in the hospital for an operation to repair some of the injuries incurred during his early parachuting days in Mexico. Jim underwent years-long treatment with a broad-spectrum antibiotic, suffering severe weight loss and amputations and spending three years in nursing homes including, at the last, a Veteran's home, when eventually his doctors gave up on him, expecting him to die.

Jim survived—he was not ready to die—and he finally decided to write what I had first suggested to him over a decade ago while we drove together through Colorado's night—a book on his life filled

with amazing, dramatic experiences . . . as a WWII airman, as a mining engineer in Mexico and as a pioneer working with the military in developing new techniques in the science of parachuting.

The result is *Parachuting for Gold in Old Mexico*, about his early years, his family, flying in the war and his life in Mexico. It is a wonderful account of a "life well-lived," of how a poor boy born in the hardscrabble hills of rural Pennsylvania went on to accomplish so much, all the while living a life that would seem to be fictional—except it is all true. I hope it will be the first installment of the full story of his amazing life and career.

Today, Jim Hall is doing much better physically, thanks to modern medicine and his indomitable spirit and the love and support of his wife of 38 years, Georgann, and their two children, Jennifer and Eagle.

The United States is fortunate to have sons like Gen. Jim Hall to defend and protect it, and I am fortunate to have Jim as my friend.