SPEECH

FOR

SEAN SWARNER

I’ve traveled many miles, literally and figuratively, vertically and on the ground, to get to this place, right here, right now. I’ve climbed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ miles going up mountains and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on the way down-yes; sometimes the peak is not the middle of the journey, and sometimes the journey is even longer and more challenging than what you’ve been told. I’ve summited the tallest mountains on every continent. I’ve completed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Ironman competitions, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_marathons, and I’ve traveled \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ miles around the world to climb those peaks and run those races, but the toughest distance I ever had to conquer were those early steps- probably not more than ten feet, from my hospital bed to the toilet when I first woke up from my year long coma \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years ago. (**HS-we will have to refine this chronology**)

Hello everyone. I’m Sean Swarner, and I am a two-time cancer survivor. There are some things I want you to know about me so that you can get an idea of who I am, what I’ve experienced, and what it is that I do now and why I do it. Here’s the background: I was a normal kid living a normal life until one day, during a routine basketball game, I hurt my leg (knee?) and all of my joints soon started aching and began to swell. I went to the doctor and found out that I had advanced stage IV Hodgkin’s disease when I was thirteen years old. Talk about a buzz kill! Honestly speaking, I would have been much happier hearing I had sprained my knee and I needed some compression and elevation for the injury, but that wasn’t in the cards. Instead I was given what amounted to a death sentence…. I mean, I hated homework, but this was a little bit of an extreme way to get out of doing my schoolwork!! (**Wait for the laugh**) I was given no more than three months to live and although I was read my last rights, put into a medically induced coma, (**HS-we have to confirm these medical facts too**) and the outlook wasn’t too rosy- to put it mildly, somehow I rallied, woke up, went on to receive chemo, and eventually got back to some sort of normalcy of my teenage years until the second gut punch hit me and I heard **THAT** word again. When I was sixteen I got the news that I had a golf ball sized tumor in my lung. This time it was Askin’s sarcoma and I was going to have to pay this particular bill with even more determination and the functionality of my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ lung. Learning I had Hodgkin’s was bad enough. To have received a diagnosis of cancer at such a young age the first time was unfathomable. The Askin’s diagnosis made the first diagnosis seem like the appetizer to a meal I wasn’t about to enjoy. Advanced stage IV Askin’s sarcoma with a prognosis of about two weeks to live is a little daunting. **WTF??** I just wanted my normal life back. To have to hear again that I had a completely unrelated form of cancer just twenty months later-well, I was in for another long bout of chemo and radiation, supported by medically induced coma- and all of THAT could have been for nothing-remember-they gave me two weeks to live and THAT was considered being optimistic. I was even read my last rites. We can safely say that I do not remember living through my sixteenth year of life. My health crises really could have broken my spirit, but somehow, although I almost gave up, miraculously, I didn’t. I lived. Somewhere within me, I just kept placing one foot in front of the other, and as if it were destiny, the stages of treatment and conquering this almost guaranteed fatal episode was kind of like an omen of what was to come…As a kid, I loved every kind of sport. From basketball to swimming to track, if it was a sport, I participated. I love competition, I suppose I’m sort of an adrenalin junkie, and I love being active. Throughout the battles with my illnesses during treatment, all of the other phases of my life were on hold while I fought along with the drugs, to reclaim my body, my spirit and my life. And somehow-and I really have to thank my parents for this, my inherent competitive spirit kicked in, I found the fighter within me, and I found the will to survive. I tell people that the human body can go for thirty days without food and about three days without water, but what I discovered at a very young age is that not one of us would last for sixty seconds without hope. I was being tested for a reason and I was determined to prevail. It’s been said, “Many of the great achievements of the world were accomplished by tired and discouraged men who kept working.” Let me tell you, I really was a tired and discouraged kid who kept fighting and hoping. I’m sure many of you know that feeling in various aspects of your lives.

That, in a nutshell, is my **story**-but it’s not who I am. My bouts with cancer were clearly life changing events-actually everything we experience changes our lives to varying degrees, but as I was lucky enough to get older and see more of life, distance provided me with perspective and although I am proud to be the first cancer survivor to summit Mount Everest, having had cancer does not define **WHO** I am. The experience of having been diagnosed with two traditionally lethal forms of the disease and having the opportunity and will to fight and survive has informed all aspects of my life and inspired my choices of how to live the rest of my time here on earth. I went on to heal and to confound the medical community; after all, both times my prognoses were grim to say the least. What happened? Why am I still here? What have I learned and what can I do to encourage others to find their own “inner climber” and to persevere through their seemingly insurmountable challenges? I believe I’m here to provide a symbol of hope and resilience and reclaimed normalcy-whatever that might be, I climb to conquer the monsters before they attack me-and you.

After high school, I went on to college and earned a Master’s degree in Psychology. I was planning to be an oncologist/psychologist (**oncological psychologist?**), but I guess one could say I realized there was a greater purpose for me, and I had to follow the destiny and trail placed before me. I thought of the challenges I had faced at such an early age and I realized how blessed I was to have survived, after all, my odds of survival were compared to the likelihood of winning the lottery 4 times-**with the same numbers**. My case baffled medical professionals. Doctors had never seen someone with such a small chance of survival actually beat the odds TWICE. I loved my life before I got sick and I appreciated everything I had-as much as a thirteen year old boy can understand and appreciate anything, but I also had the overwhelming sense that I had been through an incredibly special test and I was so blessed to have passed. My life was spared – for how long I still do not know, and I was determined to dedicate whatever time I had left in this life, on this earth, to empowering others and finding a way to instill hope in those facing seemingly insurmountable challenges. I climb to conquer the demons before they get me. I climb to give people hope. Never minimize or diminish the power and strength of the human spirit-even when a body seems to be at its weakest point. We all have to concentrate and focus. Focus to inspire yourself and one another. Inspire to motivate-motivate to inspire. What is the inspiration YOU need that can be applied to any phase of life? Think about it.

Aristotle taught that, “Hope is the dream of the waking man,” while the Dalai Lama has said, “I find hope in the darkest of days, and focus in the brightest. I do not judge the universe.” Many, if not all of you here today have faced seemingly impossible challenges. All of us know what it feels like to reach for a goal, and we also know the terror of hearing that the body you rely on, the one that gets you from place to place and seems to serve you as needed, and that you might possibly have taken for granted, has built or is building a system of cells designed to decimate you. The news comes as an impossible and surreal punch to the stomach. There are stages of reactions we can experience-in that instant as our lives literally flash before us-disbelief, denial, anger, frustration, overwhelm, and at that point it feels as if we can’t find a lifeline to grab onto. Okay-joke’s over, let’s rewind the last two minutes and make believe I didn’t hear that diagnosis. But we can’t do that. As a child, the news is incomprehensible. As an adult, the news is numbing, and as much as parents, family, friends and doctors rally to offer as much support as possible, the actual battle is very singular and lonely, and no one can do it for us. But as I endured the process of diagnosis, treatment and recovery, I realized somehow, that battling this disease really was like climbing a mountain. The journey begins with the diagnosis. Then the work with the doctor or teams of doctors to determine the course of action is equivalent to planning the itinerary, checking the supplies, and making the reservations… and then the trip begins. From base camp to the interim and higher camps, I related the climb to the stages of treatments I had received. Reaching the summit, to me, was the equivalent of having learned that the treatment was effective and the disease was being handled, contained, and hopefully eradicated, and the descent down the mountain was the remission phase, and it was in that realization, that I put two and two together, and somewhere in the process, I became a mountain climber!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Seems simple enough, no? Of course it didn’t matter at the time that I had absolutely no experience, had stared death in the face not once but twice, all before my “tentative” seventeenth birthday, and had one lung that was, for all intents and purposes, freeloading in my chest and non-functional from all of the scar tissue that served as my souvenir from the “Battle of Askin’s.” I knew the one thing that got me through those really tough times, when I was alone and there were no doctors, nurses or family that could take the terror away from me and comfort me, was hope. And like the Dalai Lama verbalized it before I had even heard the words, I found hope in the darkest of days, as a kid picturing the medication I was getting was actually the well-armed cavalry, saving me from the inside out. Through climbing, I would find focus in the brightest of vistas at each summit-that was the gift. I was given a challenge by fate, and I vowed to pick up the gauntlet for all of us.

Human beings have the wonderful, creative, and life-saving capacity to hope and to imagine. I remember as a thirteen year old kid I relied on both to get me through the treatments and to fight the demons attempting to conquer my body. I had this image of the cancer being a monster and the chemo was like a liquid cavalry, coming in to attack the monster. That was my way of handling the internal and emotional struggle at the time, but the truth is that we all look at our fight with cancer, and other sinister illnesses as a battle. What are the weapons we have at hand that we, as individuals, can employ to fight the monsters that show up to invade our space and lives? We can look to the great warriors in history and see what wisdom they have for us to “borrow” in our own personal wars. Let’s explore some of the thought process of Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese warrior, through the inspiration he has left behind. On the subject of imagination, he said, “Can you imagine what I would do if I could do all I can?” What would YOU imagine you could accomplish if YOU were able to do all that YOU could do? He also said, “The one who figures on victory at headquarters before even doing battle is the one who has the most strategic factors on his side.” In other words, envision your success. Visualize your healing. Imagine life after cancer treatment. Plan your means of attack, be prepared and place yourself at the other side of the battle. By the way, his legacy and legend also tells us that Sun Tzu very simply taught, “You have to believe in yourself.” Believe in yourself, your inner strength, and nurture your imagination. No one and nothing can take that away from you.

As I work throughout the year and plan my climbs and treks and travels, each one of you, whether you think I know you or not, are with me. We’re all members of a club that none of us wanted to be a part of, we all got the chills-I’m sure, when that invitation was dropped in our laps, and we all kicked and screamed in our own way at the thought of what might and would happen to us, but through each one of our personal fights, there are moments of grace and resilience and strength. No matter how you think you’re handling your battle, you’re in the game and that’s half the fight. You’re here, and you must intend and picture yourself living your life tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. The most important thing is to keep going; to insist on persisting, to find that next to last drop of strength and courage just when you’re fairly certain that you absolutely cannot go on. **YOU CAN**. Every time I climb a mountain, I do it for the honor and respect of all of those people, like me, who have had to face the fear of hearing **THAT** word. I do it to “represent.” I do it to stare the demons down and let them know they won’t get us. I know that years ago, many people wouldn’t even mention that “C” word. It was almost too awful to say. I’m sure we all remember learning the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt when, in his inaugural speech, he inspired the world by stating, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” To me, not speaking the name of the enemy did not support anyone in dealing with and conquering the disease. How can we beat something we can’t mention? Making believe it doesn’t exist is not a solution. How can we find a way to live with cancer if we can’t even utter the word? Sometimes, as we know, the best defense is a strong offense, and there’s no reason why that principle shouldn’t be applied to cancer. I believe in breaking it down, demystifying the “Legend of Cancer” and shattering its daunting image down to smaller less significant particles to make dealing with the disease more manageable. Often times, when I’m staring at an entire mountain looming in front of me, I cannot imagine how I, a small speck in comparison, will ever scale it and complete my journey, until I stare it in the face, plan my route, and follow my course one step at a time.

I am surrounded by and inspired by, ordinary, normal people doing extraordinary things, and that goes for each one of you. Today is no exception. As I look out at all of you, both as a collective audience and as unique individuals, I am certain that for every person here, there is a legend, a story, a point of inspiration, and a lesson in perseverance. Every day we hear all kinds of stories concerning all matter of crises of almost super human proportions-first responders risking their lives to save others’ lives in natural disasters, heroes placing themselves in harm’s way to thwart an enemy’s attack, our armed forces fighting in foreign countries to insure that we remain free and that our rights and privileges as Americans are preserved, and then I think of all of you, fighting on your own, waging your own private, personal wars, and not only fighting the monsters within your bodies, but trying to make sense of the administrative red tape, daunting medical details and bills, probably feeling sick and tired and seemingly unable to go on, trying to keep a sense of normalcy in your family while, heaven forbid, wondering about the possibility of what could happen…to me, all of **YOU** really are extraordinary.

To be clear, the definition of extraordinary is simple-and I will tell you what it is, but first, I want you to know that the reason I offer definitions like this is so that we are all very clear as to what the message is. I have learned through my climbing that clarity is key to survival and that confusion can be catastrophic. As I use climbing as a metaphor for conquering disease and crises, I also use it to bring understanding and an attempt at wisdom and knowing to the other areas of my life. So, given all of that, the definition for “extraordinary” is simple. It means, “Beyond or out of the common order or method; not usual, customary, regular, or ordinary; as, extraordinary evils; extraordinary remedies.” I think it’s safe to say, that even with an increase in the occurrence of certain cancers, having cancer is extraordinary, and learning to cope with the disease and conquering it is even more extraordinary. Extraordinary acts do not require tons of attention or fanfare. They do not require that the world witness every phase of an occurrence. Each one of you, in your own way, has experienced remarkable and extraordinary events with regard to your own encounter with cancer or other medical or personal crises.

Extraordinary people fighting extraordinary battles. That’s us. We’ve all been through the muddled, dark confusing phases of our respective diseases. No matter how much equipment we thought we had or needed, sometimes it just didn’t seem to be the answer to our hard work and prayers, but as we struggled to place one foot in front of the other, we learned that we were alive in that moment-alive enough to place the next metaphoric foot in the front of the other. Life is kinetic. Nothing stands still. Every living thing and every human being struggles and grows and learns from the experience. We have to remember that through that cycle, it doesn’t always stay dark, we won’t always feel so sick, and we’re still alive to hold on to even the smallest thread of hope. And sometimes those threads are **really small**. My mother tells the story of when I got sick the second time and I was told I had only a few weeks to live… at sixteen years old!! She remembers I said to her, “Even if I have only a short time here, it’s been a great life.” (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**) Wow!! I wish I still were that wise!! (**Wait for the laugh**). And speaking of maintaining a sense of humor through the fight, I heard of a young guy named Miles. Miles had brain cancer. He also had a great sense of humor. His father had owned a comedy club in Chicago and Miles loved to laugh. Through his illness, his father started a website and a campaign called, “Jokes 4 Miles.” The goal of the project was simply to gather five thousand jokes to share with children battling cancer so that they might have a little laugh in those dark times. People from all over the world started sending in video jokes, and word spread to the entertainment community as well. Marie Osmond asks, “Why was the sand wet? Because the sea…weed.” One little kid asks, “What to elves learn in school?” and the response is, “The elf-abet.” As Miles fought his disease and as the collection on the website grew, the purpose was always clear, “We ask for jokes, not donations.” Even through his own personal crisis, Miles Austrevich found a way to laugh and to nurture others through humor and a sense of community, and although he fought so bravely for four years, his legacy is one of consideration, humor, and community.

I speak about hope and how my imagination got me through some really rough spots. I’ve also witnessed some tragedies in my life, as I am sure most of you have as well, if not personally, then through friends or news reports. Having empathy for those unforeseen tragedies is critical in living a complete life, and although we never want to be a part of that darkness, crises attack when we least expect it. Many times there is not enough time to prepare and few of us can live our lives in full catastrophe mode. The reason why I mention this now in a talk that should be about hope and inspiration, is that, as the saying goes, “How does one carve an elephant out of a block of stone?” And the response is, “chip away everything that’s not the elephant.” In order to be left with the technology to hope, we have to chisel away at the parts of our inner workings that don’t allow for hope and determination to prevail. When I got sick, I was a naïve thirteen year old. I just wanted to live and slay the monster inside me. Some people are not that lucky. I have heard stories and seen patients give up their fight and ultimately lose the battle. Was their concession premature? Or was their time up? We won’t know that, but we do know you’re here now and living and still maintaining the capacity to hope and live on or to allow someone you know to do the same. The question is, how do we fight through those really difficult times when it really seems like the end is near? What motivates us? What drives us? How can we learn to sustain ourselves and become more of a master of our circumstances even though we may have to admit we have very little control?

I have been thinking of a way to break down the “technology” that works for me. It comes down to three words: visualization, motivation, and positivity.

The definition of visualization is, “the formation of visual images” or “the act or process of interpreting in visual terms or of putting into visual form.” I think many of us do casual versions of visualization frequently during our daily lives. I’m sure the ladies present imagine what they’re going to wear later and the guys might picture the more exciting plays that might take place in the next football or baseball game they plan to watch. We all know that visualization is a technique that has been applied by people with cancer and other diseases as well as other circumstances in life. In an interview with CNN, screenwriter David Seidler, known for winning an Oscar for his work on “The King’s Speech,” discussed his bouts with bladder cancer. He claims that although he received treatment and the cancer returned, the second round of the disease inspired him to practice visualizing a “lovely, clean, healthy bladder.” He diligently practiced his visualization every day for two weeks and according to the article, at that time he had been cancer free for five years. Of course, there is debate as to whether or not this truly works. The point is, it can’t hurt to employ visualization as an additional support in the battle with cancer, and positive imaging will also encourage positive thoughts and feelings.

What’s the definition of “Motivation?” It’s “the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way”, or, “the general desire or willingness of someone to do something.” We all have our own motivational techniques to get us going every day. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com, once said, “The thing that motivates me is a very common form of motivation. And that is, with other folks counting on me, it’s easy to be motivated.” Bezos built an empire that serves clients, employees, and vendors. If he decided to check out of his responsibilities, although no one is irreplaceable, there is a lot of well being across many platforms that would be sacrificed. Believe me, each one of us has people counting on us, and I know, more often than not, if it weren’t for all of those people like YOU, relying on little ole me to keep my word, sometimes I would just stay under the covers and chill. The internal tapes can go on in my head ad nauseum…”I don’t wanna” …”It’s too cold”…”my stomach hurts…I want a REAL TOILET…” …”MY PACK IS TOO HEAVY…” “WAAAAAA WAAAA WAAAAAAA…” But that doesn’t necessarily inspire results or actions or change in attitude or situations. I am standing here, in front of all of you, and I appear to be the picture of health, determination, and enthusiasm, and my “can do” spirit literally can move mountains… or so it seems. Believe me, my “game face” isn’t always shaved and washed and ready for action! There are plenty of times that I. Just. Don’t. Want. To. But I do what I have to do, **because I said I would**. I gave my word and my word is my bond. Sometimes I look back on those teenage years when I was so sick and it seemed so noble at the time to devote my life to spreading awareness and enthusiasm to “keep climbing,” and honestly, even though I do not plan on stopping at all in the foreseeable future, there are days when I ask myself, “Sean, what the heck were you thinking?” All of us have the chance to take what seems to be the “easy” way out and to at times shirk commitments-especially those of you who are in treatment and might be having a tough time. But if you allow yourself to succumb to the counterproductive urge to stay under the covers, ask yourself, “Will I really feel better afterwards? Does a pity party really work in this situation?” Sometimes it does, and every once in a while it’s okay to be a little self indulgent, but never lose sight of who is looking up to you, who’s counting on you, and what has to be done in order for you to ultimately feel even a little better.

So now let’s see what “positivity” means. The definition of the word is, “a quality or state characterized by certainty or acceptance or affirmation and dogmatic assertiveness,” or “the quality of being encouraging or promising of a successful outcome.” Sounds simple enough, no? “Dogmatic assertiveness.” Promising of a successful outcome.” It’s what I’ve been saying all along!! There are times, probably more often than not, when cancer patients are “in the weeds,” meaning they’re frightened, feeling trapped, sick, tired and in pain, and may not be in the mood to feel positive emotions and think positive thoughts. People have to express and feel what is authentic in each moment. Patients may feel guilty or angry or scared, and we may not want to “reward” ourselves with positive thoughts. Some medical professionals may not truly prescribe to the theory that positivity is a valid technique in coping with and possibly eradicating cancer, but once again, is there really a down side to having a hopeful thought? Is thinking encouraging thoughts going to hurt anyone? I don’t think so, so what the heck!! Forgive yourself and let some light into your life!

We also live in a time that, for better or worse, we are all connected to each other more than ever before. As we fight our fight, encouragement, information and life saving news and treatments can reach us with unprecedented speed and work to heal us in more immediate and less invasive ways. The methods and options we have available to us, thanks to modern technology, give us the opportunity to be connected on essential levels and for critical-not only social reasons. Although we may feel as though we’re experiencing “high tech overload,” think of the positive points to having such unprecedented personal access. We have the opportunity to be closer to our doctors, our support systems, and the ability to be informed of the latest treatment updates from either our own communities or from around the world, and we have the means to share our strength and encouragement or to ask for help and guidance when we need it. The future is now. When I’m climbing, I no longer have to worry about the terror of isolation-I have my satellite phone in the event of an emergency, and there are other means of communication for rescue, the relay of information, and the opportunity to share the joy of our achievements in real time when we reach a milestone or summit. None of us have to be alone or suffer from isolation and ignorance-if we don’t want it.

I speak mostly of battles with cancer, but I want you to know that I hold ALL of you with me when I climb. We all have our struggles and monsters that conspire to take us down, and whether the demons are hatched from cancer or other medical conditions, or of another nature like physical limitations, emotional, financial or professional stresses, I’m here to encourage each one of you to find the strength within to keep climbing in order to sustain your spirit and find the way to be senior to your particular crisis. I think of the work I do, and sometimes…well, **most** times, I think I must be kind of insane to be doing this. It always seems like such a good idea in the planning stages… The adrenalin rush begins, I picture my camping gear and my climbing equipment, I think of the people I’ll see again and the new ones I’ll meet, I remember the guides who have been so welcoming, able, strong and reliable, and then…I think about the potential danger I face while on the mountain. And eventually, the doubt starts to kick in….Oh, have I told you about the time when my brain started to swell? Not a lot of fun, I’ll tell you THAT much!! In fact, there are many physical ailments and conditions that come as souvenirs of climbing, like (**name 3 or 4 physical conditions you’ve experienced while climbing**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, or who can ever forget the time \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Boy!!! THAT wasn’t too pleasant!! Or when we climbed Mt, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, who would have ever expected \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? But the way I figure it, possibly one of the reasons that I climb is to give some kind of credence to the adage, “If you think you have issues, go get a bigger problem!” Believe me, I’ve found a bigger problem!! Fighting for one’s survival on the side of a slippery death trap of a mountain or preparing to tackle an icy crevice is definitely a sure fire way to bring a person right into the moment!!

I think about those early days and what it was that motivated me, and how setting my sights on the next climb inspires me to inspire you. I think that if I can face fear at such a magnitude, and I study how I cope with such seemingly impossible situations, then hopefully I can guide you through your own personal journeys. Each and every one of you are with me, and as a tribute to your tenacity and spirit, each time I climb, I carry a flag to bury at the summit, and on that flag are names of cancer survivors I meet who obviously inspire me, and the truth is, ALL OF YOU inspire me. Even though, as I said, we have to fight our own battles, you are each members of my inner cavalry-my NEW cavalry, that inspire me to fight the monsters, both in me and in you. You may think you’re stuck where you are, but trust me, I take you with me on each trip. Your stories fuel my drive. Your grace propels my left foot to go to the next step, and then my right, and on and on and on.

Oscar Wilde once said, “What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.” No one asks for cancer. No one wants it. No one likes it. But each one of us has been affected by it, either personally or through a family member, friend, or acquaintance. And whether we want to admit it or not, cancer changes our lives forever. In the past, we had been used to surmising that cancer equals death. Fortunately, that is not as true today as it was years ago. There have been great advancements and although there may be more cases reported each year, the chances and statistics of survival have improved. I am not going to quote statistics… we know prevention, detection and treatment have come a long way. Cancer is no longer the death sentence it was in the past. And we also know that cancer teaches us. It teaches us to appreciate what we have, whether within ourselves or regarding those we love and respect. It teaches us to value life and to appreciate what we have and the amazing lives we live-no matter what we might be going through. Being diagnosed with cancer has the potential to be one of the most bitter trials we might have to face in our lives, but with education, treatment, and the courage to face the disease head on, we learn and we prevail to the best of our own abilities.

I will keep climbing to spread the message of hope, resilience and tenacity, and to let everyone I meet know that you are able to climb your own mountain, you have everything you need to face your own demons, and you are not alone. And as each one of you achieves your own goals and milestones on your own journeys of survival, extend a helping hand to someone who needs it. From that gesture you’ll really learn just how strong you are. I know that personally. You guys fuel my adrenaline rush!! (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**) I’m sure my mother is thrilled about that!! (**Wait for the laugh**)

(**If there is anyone in particular that you want to acknowledge, do that here**). I want to thank all of you for being here today, and in particular, I’d like to acknowledge \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (**If you acknowledge your team, do that too-and I would acknowledge your brother as well-it seems like he is really there for you**). I want to also thank my team, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for always being there for me and making sure those knots are well secured!! (**If that’s what they do-or say something like that**). Most of all, I want to thank my parents, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for giving me this extraordinary life and cause. Thank you all!