



Columbia, Loss, and the Search for Eldorado

*I have attempted to share reflections that come from the heart,
and hope they do justice and honor for our colleagues and their families.*

ELDORADO

Gaily bedight
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—
This knight so bold—
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow—
'Shadow' said he,
'Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The shade replied,—
'If you seek for Eldorado!'

—Edgar Allan Poe

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I FIRST HEARD THIS POEM RECITED BY WILEY BUNN MANY years ago at a project management course. (Wiley Bunn was an esteemed NASA leader of the Marshall Space Flight Center across several decades.) Wiley concluded each of his presentations at NASA with the poem. He felt it best captured the adventure, passion, persistence, and boldness associated with NASA and in particular Human Space Exploration.

The words have always had a powerful ring for me. They strike a chord that seems so much a connection to my experience as part of NASA. For me, within the words is an eternal story of exploration, search for meaning, and remembrance.

Part of an explorer's spirit is a commitment and sacrifice to seek the unknown, to expand the boundaries, and to open up a frontier so that others can follow. There must also be an awareness that the search can never be completely fulfilled. One accomplishment leads to another, and one attained voyage beckons another. The ultimate joy for such individuals must come from a life well led and full.

Remembrance is also an essential quality for people that we value and cherish. I recall words that I first heard as a teenager upon the sudden death of my father, "May his memory be a blessing for all your years." I am not certain who uttered the words, but their simplicity weaves a powerful truth that holds. It is a binding agreement with those who came before that what they started we will continue. An acknowledgment that we will be better and do better, because we knew them.

When I think of *Columbia* STS-107—Rick Husband, Willie McCool, Michael Anderson, David Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark, and Ilan Ramon—it makes me think of NASA, exploration, sacrifice, remembrance, a search for meaning, commitment, poetry, and family. •