Obviously we get that question a fair amount. For me, it was kind of a logical progression. I think at a very early age I loved airplanes. And kind of went after that goal to some degree. And it just seemed to be a natural progression.

As you fly airplanes you want to fly the next biggest experimental, you know, high-flying, fastest vehicle and the shuttle is that and it's probably going to be for a long time as far as anything comparatively speaking.

So, it was just a great opportunity and I worked hard obviously, but had a little luck involved too and it's just a great privilege to be able to go fly it. There are a number of them and some of them are fairly emotional.

You know, all the time and effort to get to that point when you first get into space. Just all the things that led you there.

So those first few moments when you first experience microgravity that was definitely
one very strong memory. And, you know, I think just that first time that you get
to gaze out a window either on the space station or on the space shuttle,
just to look back at Earth, it's just unbelievable the view that you have.

The biggest challenge. For me, I think getting through the Columbia accident I think was
probably the biggest for me. One because I was the lead astronaut that strapped
in the crew. So I worked with them quite a bit before the mission and then,
you know, just dealing with the aftermath.

That for me personally was probably the biggest challenge.

It was obviously hard on the entire country and on the Astronaut Corps,
but to lose seven people, you know, that you're close to.

And it kind of makes you dig deep and look down inside yourself and ask
if this is really what you want to do and if it's worth it and if it's the right thing.

And, you know, I was convinced it was.

I think the biggest surprise for me is the adjustment that you have to make from living on
Earth to living on space and being there for a number of days and then coming back.

You know, you're laying on your back on the pad thinking you're probably not going to go because there's going to be a weather issue and you come out of the 9-minute hold and 17 minutes later you're in space.

And just adjusting your psyche to that is just a lot harder than you think.

And then you come back from a mission, you land and two days later you're mowing your lawn.

And it's just almost, I hate using the word, but it is, it's surreal.

And when you think back on a mission it's almost like it was a dream and it's,

you kind of have to ask yourself, 'Was that really me?' 'Did I really do that?' 'Was I really there?' Because it is so much different than the rest of, you know,

your life and so much removed from it. It's just so rewarding and exciting and tiring.

It's a lot of hard work. But just a tremendous experience that you're just never going to forget.

And I'm thankful that they take a lot of pictures and a lot of video so you can look back at it because you kind of have to look at that stuff every now and again just to convince yourself that
you actually did do it.