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## Falling to Earth

It was one week before my eighteenth birthday, and my mom knew exactly what I wanted. I've always been drawn to the thrill of extreme sports: white water rafting, bungee jumping, and pretty much any sport that had a chance of potential doom. Knowing this, my mom decided to pay for my dad, my brother, and me to go skydiving. At this point, skydiving was just another thing to cross off my growing list of dangerous sports to brag about to my friends. Little did I know that one of the most exciting, adrenaline pumping, and high intensity things that a person can do would be one of the most peaceful ways to change and organize my view on the world.

It was the morning of my birthday, July twenty-ninth, and on the outside I looked like a normal eighteen year old, but on the inside I felt like a four year old receiving his first big wheel tricycle. I did a good job at hiding my apprehension though.

"You nervous?" I nonchalantly asked my brother.

"Nah, not really," he lied, the way that a big brother would.

"Me neither," I lied back to hide my weakness.

We both had mixed feelings, from the little kid getting a tricycle, to the inmate taking his last walk to the electric

chair. My manhood was on the line; either I would jump out of a plane or I would be made fun of by my older brother for the rest of my life. There was no turning back at that point.

We were getting in the car to drive to the jump zone, and we were all thinking the same thing: "I'm about to jump out of a freaking plane." We arrived at Canton Air Sports and filled out the paperwork saying that if we died it's not their fault.

"That's reassuring," I whispered to my mom. We had an appointment time, but there were several groups waiting to jump before us. Watching person after person land and hug their loved ones made me a little more comfortable.

It came time for us to prepare to load up in the plane. Up to that point, I had calmed down and had gotten used to the idea of skydiving. My instructor called me over to get in a jumpsuit and put on my harness. I was about to fall eleven thousand feet. All of my preparation, my mental training, and my boastfulness left my body as I walked towards my "electric chair." We straddled cushioned beams in the center of the small plane and all filed in. We began ascending to eleven thousand feet. My heart rate shot up instantly. I had a cold sweat, partially because it was roughly thirty degrees cooler at altitude. My level of adrenaline was making me more and more anxious.

An instructor scooted to the garage-styled door and slid it up. The plane filled with the thunder of the wind and the roar

of the propeller as I peered down at the earth below me. It was a euphoric and entrancing feeling. I had flown in planes before, but being in a commercial plane is almost like taking a bus ride. This was an entirely different feeling. Looking through a gaping hole in the plane made me experience something that I had never thought I would experience from skydiving. I looked at the ground, and I saw Earth. I didn't see a dotted line that separated counties, I didn't see color coded areas that showed territories, I didn't see fences guarding someone's property. I just saw Earth. Everything happened so fast, but my mind was moving a million times faster. We scooted to the door; I crossed my arms, leaned forward, leaned back, and leaned forward one last time and fell.

I was tumbling head over heels watching the plane fly off one moment, then the ground getting closer the next. I saw sky, then ground, then sky, then ground, over and over until we balanced out and got in the proper form. I was skydiving. My mind was still working at a thousand times faster than it normally does, so I had all the time in the world to observe.

I didn't feel like I was falling; I felt like I was flying. I couldn't help but to think if this is how birds feel. Birds don't need a passport or a driver's license to go places. If only the whole world could be like this. The sociological imagination explains that if a person steps out of society and

distances him/herself from the influences of the world, then he or she can truly see the workings of humanity. What I have to say to that is: I was two miles high, literally separated from society, falling at 120 miles per hour. I didn't see humanity, I didn't see property, I didn't see war, but I saw one big rock that we were all created to live on. I saw the way that people and governments treat each other is like a child that hasn't quite learned to share yet.

My forty-five second free fall seemingly lasted hours, but six thousand feet later I pulled the rip cord. My decent slowed to about twenty miles per hour and gave me more time to reflect on this amazing spectacle. I began to see roads, buildings, and eventually people. As I drifted back down from the heavens, I thought the three things: what would people be like if everyone saw civilization the way that I had just experienced and why do people act the way they do after stepping back to look? It seems so insignificant, and could I predict whether this would really change anything or if I would just forget about the ecstasy and continue life as I have? We floated closer to the ground and flared the parachute toggles, slowing us down to a speed where we could easily land on our feet, and we touched ground.

The five minute journey lasted much longer than just five minutes. The feeling is still quarrying deep through my bones over one year later, and I feel it every day. Suddenly the

ignorance, the hate, and the petty excursions of everyday life trouble me. People hear that I have been skydiving, and they ask me how it was. I could say what I feel and tell them it was an experience that has changed everything from my views on society to the way that I treat others, but I don't because the feeling that I had is not something that someone can be taught or explained to a person. There is no way that I can share my feelings and have that person feel the same way. I just tell them that it is awesome and that they should try it. The actual act of skydiving didn't change my views per say, but it was the tranquility of the fall that led my mind to enlightenment of the world. The hardest part is having so much to say, not about skydiving, but about humanity, and not being able to share it. Whether this is something experienced by others or if I am the lonely skydiver that looked too far into falling out of a plane, I can undoubtedly say that I am glad that I have this feeling and I will ultimately figure a way to put my motivation towards something that betters myself and society.