

Lowell Speech

In skydiving there are three basic rules. Number 1: pull your chute. Number 2: pull your chute at the right altitude. Number 3: pull your chute at the right altitude and while stable. So basically the important thing to remember is to pull.

My first student jump, when I had my own rig and piloted my own chute, I landed within 10 feet of the target x on the landing field. My second student jump I landed in a tree. I was doing great, and then I didn't turn hard enough and there was a gust of wind. I can vividly remember the 30 or so feet before I hit. At that close I knew that I wouldn't be able to avoid it. I can remember 5 feet away from it when I covered my eyes and curled into a ball. I landed almost exactly in between two trees, fell for about 20 or 30 feet before my parachute caught and jerked to a stop. They tell you in case of a tree landing you should find a branch and hold on. I was about 5 feet from the closest branch so I had to swing myself away from it twice before I could get enough momentum to reach it. I had to hold on for half a minute before the first person running could reach me, then answer yes to the next 10 ask me if I was alright. Lurch, the wingsuit guy, was the one who climbed up the tree; apparently when people land in trees they generally need someone to keep them calm. I figured that freaking out wouldn't help anything, so I didn't. That night they also started calling me Acorn, because I landed in an Oak. But I kept jumping, I'd fallen in love with it.

Every time I go up it gets easier. The fear lessens but the excitement stays the same. When I get up to 14 thousand feet and am hanging outside the plane, that's the part I come for, that expectant heart flutter as I take a half second to think to myself, Yes, I am about to jump out of a perfectly good airplane at 14 thousand feet and plummet towards the earth. I'm currently 11 jumps away from getting my A-license, and although it took me 6 years of elementary, 2 years of middle, 4 years of high school and 4 years at Harvard, I've finally found something I can potentially make a living at while enjoying every second of. Skydiving.

As I walk around campus watching my friends worry about their theses and getting in to med school and stressing over consulting interviews, I find myself constantly looking up at the sky thinking, could I have jumped today? Is the visibility high enough and the wind speed low enough? I walk through Lowell courtyard with my head turned upwards, the human sunflower pose of skydivers and their viewers. I don't have any plans for next year. I'm doing Fall Clean-up and then going to Burning Man, the hippy artsy temporary city in Nevada, but after that I have no idea. At first I felt a little bad about that, thinking to myself, well, I went to Harvard, I should have a plan. But that's just it; I went to Harvard. I came here for the name and the academics, to graduate with a Harvard degree. But along the way my views of Harvard, of the direction my life was pointing me, changed. I realized here, somewhere between cleaning toilets for Dorm Crew, performing in Cultural Rhythms, and hating every minute of Deductive Logic, that I didn't want the post-graduate plans. I didn't want to be yet again tied into a two year TFA commitment or go through 2-4 more years of graduate study. I wanted to actually go with the flow. Not in the general easy-going day to day situational type flow, but the current of life. I wanted a chance to be swept along by events beyond my control, to stop worrying about what was the right or the smart thing to do, and give myself a chance to breathe, to get to know more the person I've become.