**August 9, 2020**

Dad almost died today.

I woke up at Sam’s house in San Diego around 11 am, checked my phone, and saw a message from my mom that Dad had gotten into a freak accident while flying at Jupiter peak this morning and she didn’t know if he was going to be okay.

I immediately called her and she started sobbing over the phone.

I felt numb. I wanted facts and numbers and details. I had no space in my brain for emotion, only information.

She told me that he had a full wing collapse and fell from about 150 feet up. His wing didn’t re-inflate. He fell into an aspen grove, which it turns out saved his life.

The aspens softened his fall and tangled his wing (which I’m assuming also softened his fall, or at least slowed it down). He luckily had the air bag inflated on his harness, which the medics say probably saved his back and his spine from the fall.

He was conscious when he was found by his two friends - Josh and Kevin. They saw him fall and sprinted down the mountain to him in about 2 minutes.

They said they found him in a fetal pose groaning and in shock.

He was kept still as much as possible by them as they got the medics on the way and got him out of his gear. They had to wait for the search and rescue to get to them, which took about 40 minutes of bushwhacking.

They ended up not needing to call the air rescue, which was a good sign, because that meant dad was in a stable condition.

He even told them to not airlift him since it would be expensive... oh dad.

When I was on the phone with mom, he was on the way to the hospital and she was practically hysterical because she couldn’t do anything. She couldn’t call anyone on the ambulance because they were in the mountains on their way to the hospital. She couldn’t call the hospital because he hadn’t been admitted yet. And she wasn’t allowed to visit him because of COVID.

The only way someone can visit someone in the hospital right now is if the person isn’t conscious or able to make their own decisions.

So even though it was painful emotionally for mom to not be able to go see him, she knew it meant that he was at least conscious, which was such a good sign.

He was also moving his toes and fingers, which meant his fall didn’t injure his spinal chord enough to paralyze him.

Eventually, he got on the phone (loopy from pain meds) and texted everyone saying he was alright and just had a lot of back pain.

He’s good now. Or at least as good as he can be. He is going to be discharged from the hospital tonight and all he needs is a back brace for his fractured L1.

He got away with no other broken bones that I know of, no head injuries, and no spinal chord injuries.

He got SO lucky. How he managed to escape the fate of the universe today I don’t understand. But I know that our family must have done something good to deserve dad’s survival today.

I don’t know what I would have done if he hadn’t been okay.

There was no room to think of that alternative this morning.

Not when you are numb and don’t have room for emotions.

Not when you just have room for the facts and nothing else.

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The thought of him just laying there on the ground in fetal pose, alone, in shock, afraid, in pain....

It *kills* me.

I hate that.

I don’t know what I would have done if dad hadn’t been okay.

I don’t know how I feel about the flying family anymore.

I’ve never felt this close to death.

I always hear about accidents that happen, but those accidents never happened to me. They never happen to my family.

Those accidents aren’t real until they happen to us. And now I see how dangerous they can be.

Dad was so lucky today.

The universe chose to spare him.

To spare all of us.

Life is so fragile.

Life can be taken from us in a split second, with no warning, with no motivation, with no preparation.

Life is fleeting, life is temporary.

Which is why we live it to the fullest while we can. This is why Dad flies. This is why Wesley flies. This is why Eric flies. This is why I fly.

Perhaps this danger comes with the domain. To live a full and fulfilling and meaningful life, we take on the risk that our life might be cut short at any moment.

I don’t know what today means for the flying family, but I know what it means for our family.

It means that we are all here for one another unconditionally. We are all here for each other to love each other, in sickness and in health, until, during, and after death may part us.

I love my Dad forever.

I love my Mom forever.

I love Eric forever.

I love Wesley forever.

I love Claudia forever.

I love Dylan. I love Sam. I love every person in my life - past, present, future.

I love my life.

I love the universe.

I submit.

I know I have no control. I never did and I never will. I can control my present actions and emotions (to a certain extent) - but that is it.

I can’t control others and what they think of me. I can’t control others actions. I can’t control the uncontrollable parts of life - the weather, the wind, the future, the past....

But I can control what I think and what I do, right in this moment.

And I choose to love fully, unconditionally.

I choose to be here.

I choose love. I choose life.

There are so many other things that I think I need time to process about my time in California here as I look out the window of the plane right now.

From skydiving, from my time with Claudia and Juju, from my time with just Claudia, from my time with Sam and his friends, from my time with just Sam, from my time alone and with new friends, from my time with strangers.

There is so much to process and I am going to do it another day.

For now, I have a headache. My stomach is upset from the day. My body is sore and tired and sun burnt.

I’m ready to go home.

My family is my world. They always come first.

I love you Dad. Thank you for making it today.

❤️

* Jessie J. Smith
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