

MAG – 021 – Freefall

Content Warnings

- Heights & vertigo
- **Discussions of:** falling, panic, acrophobia
- **Mentions of:** parental death, child death, worms
- **SFX:** Strange worms

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Twenty One Freefall

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Moira Kelly, regarding the disappearance of her son Robert.

Original statement given October 20th 2002. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read a loud from the archived witness statement of Moira Kelly)

You must forgive me if it takes a while to get this all down on paper. I'm not a fast writer and what I saw is... It's all very well to say "write down what you saw", but what if you don't have the words? What I saw doesn't make any sense, and it makes my head hurt awfully when I try to remember it well enough to describe.

Am I mad? What happened is mad. It can't have happened. But it did. It took my Robert, and...3 now I can't even think of how to put it down in a way that explains it. Maybe somewhere in your library are the words that explain what happened, what I saw, but I haven't read your books, and knowing wouldn't bring him back. I suppose I'll just have to try.

My son, Robert, was always an adventurous boy. Even when he was a child he'd be running off and getting into scrapes every chance he got. We were living out in the country back then, Althorpe, a little village in Lincolnshire, and every chance he got Robert would be out in the woods with his friends, climbing trees and exploring deep into the forests. He had a few other children who would join him, but he always climbed higher than they did, always pushed further. I can't even remember all the times he almost got himself lost out there when he was growing up.

As he got older his interests changed, but that sense of danger never left him. I used to have to drive him half an hour every Wednesday because that was the closest leisure centre with a climbing wall, and he was obsessed with reaching the top. After he went away to university, he'd come home every holiday with some new dangerous sport he'd taken up: wakeboarding, mountain-biking. He almost missed his father's funeral because he was away on a scuba-diving trip to Cyprus, and only just managed to book a last minute flight home. It wasn't his fault, of course, Stephen's death came as a shock to us all; what I mean to say is... I wasn't at all surprised when he told me a few years ago that he'd gotten very involved in skydiving.

t had started as a charity thing. His last year at Yarmouth he decided to do a skydive for a charity he'd been volunteering with. I went along to support him when he did it, and when he touched down I could see it in his eyes, even

before he'd removed his parachute, that he was in love. Since then, it was rare that a month went by without him throwing himself out of a plane, to the point where I wondered where he was getting the money, as from what I hear it's not a cheap hobby, and he certainly wasn't getting much from me.

Shortly after Robert graduated, he came to visit. He was the happiest I'd seen him since his father passed away, and when I asked him about it he said he'd got a job with a company that ran skydiving all over the country. They were called Open Skydiving and, his face was beaming when he said this, he was now a fully qualified skydiving instructor. I was happy for him of course, even though every time he described jumping it sounded quite dreadful to me. I had always made it clear that he was never going to get me up there, plummeting through the sky.

After that, I didn't see him much. He was home for Christmas and Mother's Day, if I was lucky, but aside from that it was the occasional phone call or even a postcard if he was running a dive at somewhere far away. I have a small stack of them back home, all I really have to remember him by. I remember he sent me one from Aberystwyth of all places, not too far back, and he signed it "with love from your free-falling son". I used to really like that, but now the phrase just makes shudder.

He was happy, though. He was doing what he loved. I try to hold on to that. There was no way for me to know that anything was wrong. I mean, nothing was wrong. I'm sure of it. Not until that last time.

He came to see me three months ago. I was surprised, as June is the height of the season and his last phone call had seemed to say that he was expecting to be busy right up until winter arrived. Still, here he was, standing on the doorstep and he looked to be in an awful state. He had deep bags under his

eyes and it didn't look as though he'd washed in some time. Before he'd said anything I took him inside, sat him down and started to run a hot bath.

Whatever had happened, I told him, could wait until he'd gotten himself together. I think I had the right of it, as once he had cleaned himself up and had some hot food he seemed a lot more himself than he had been. Still, he spent a good ten minutes just sat there, staring into space.

I asked him what the matter was, whether he'd had an accident or lost his job or something. When I said that, he laughed an odd sort of laugh and said that he had lost his job. He'd quit, he said. I asked him why, after all he had always loved the whole business of skydiving, but as I said the word 'sky' I saw him flinch back like I had slapped him. So I quieted down and asked him to tell me what had happened.

They'd been running a dive up near Doncaster, he said. Some 85-year-old doing a tandem jump for charity in memory of his wife. He hadn't been the one actually doing the jump with the old man, but it was a significant enough thing that his colleague had asked him to come up as well for support. He'd be coming down alone on a solo parachute. It all started well enough, the flight up was fine and the old man, who said his name was Simon, appeared to be having a great time, making jokes and quite frankly a lot more eager to throw himself out of a plane than almost anyone Robert had ever met before.

Finally the climb finished and the door was opened to the rush of air. Harriet Fairchild, the instructor, readied herself to jump, with Simon strapped to her chest. It was at this moment, Robert said, that the old man turned to him, shouting something. He didn't hear it clearly, but thought it had been "enjoy sky blue". He'd felt dizzy all of a sudden, almost falling to the floor as Harriet hurled herself and her passenger out of the plane. It passed in a moment,

though, and he pushed himself out of the door, and was greeted by that familiar plunging feeling in his stomach as he began his freefall.

He knew something was wrong almost immediately. He was jumping, he said, from about ten thousand feet, so should have been falling for almost thirty seconds before opening his parachute, but he was having trouble keeping count. The clear blue sky was so bright it seemed to blind him, and the numbers were all jumbled in his head. His balance seemed to be all turned around and he said he had had to shut his eyes tight against the brightness, concentrating to keep his count. Finally, he reached what he thought was thirty seconds, and went to pull his ripcord, but as he did, he said, he opened his eyes again and froze. The ground was gone.

I asked him what he meant, had he got turned around, maybe. He just shook his head, and told me again that the ground had gone. All that there was, he said, was that vast, empty blue sky, stretching off before him, but still he was falling into it. It was bright, he kept saying, it was so bright, although there was no sun in that sky and no clouds for it to hide behind. Just the empty, blue sky in all directions as he fell into it. He wanted to pull the ripcord, to unfurl his parachute, but his hand wouldn't close over the grip. So he just fell.

Robert was shaking badly at this point, so I got him a blanket and made him another cup of tea. I wasn't sure I believed all what he was saying, but he'd certainly been through something dreadful; I could see that. I asked him how long he'd been falling like that, and he said he didn't know. His watch had stopped, but it had felt like hours. Days even. He had been so hungry, he said, but had just kept falling. He didn't know which direction; there was just that empty sky all around, so it was impossible to tell.

Finally, he said, he saw the ground again. It didn't feel like a change or a sudden difference, he just closed his eyes as he had so often in that place, and when he opened them it was there, green and sprawling and rushing up towards him. He'd been so relieved he'd almost forgotten to deploy his parachute. He did, though, and landed safely near the target area.

He was greeted by Harriet, who was surprised by how long it had taken him to get down. She told him it was almost fifteen minutes after when he should have hit the ground, and Simon, this old man, and his supporters had already left. It was obvious something was wrong, and Harriet asked Robert if he was alright. He repeated, "fifteen minutes, just fifteen", and she told him "yes, what had been the problem?" Robert quit right there and then, and it was shortly after that he came to see me.

Now obviously I was a bit speechless at my son's tale. It's hard to say how much of it I thought to be true. I didn't think he would ever have lied to me about something like this, but at the same time the sort of thing he described, well, I didn't think it sounded like something from a healthy mind. Let's just say I was thinking the sort of thing... you'll be thinking in a few minutes. Point is, I tried to talk him through his problems and his feelings, but the more he talked about it, the more agitated he became, until at last I decided that we weren't getting anywhere, and I got his old room ready for him. He slept soundly that night, as far as I remember.

The next morning was a beautiful day. The sun was streaming through the window and the air was warm and still, without it being as hot as it had been the week before. When Robert finally woke up, I suggested that we go for a short walk to enjoy the day, and hopefully clear out any of that fear he felt that was still hovering about. He didn't seem to want to go, at first, he kept glancing

at the cloudless sky, but I promised him a picnic lunch and that seemed to convince him.

That last hour was one of the happiest I'd ever spent with my son. In the sunlight, the bags under his eyes seemed to disappear, and after a few minutes he even stopped glancing at the sky all the time. We walked along, sometimes talking, sometime silent, and the world seemed to be alright.

There's a hill near where I live. It's a gentle, grassy slope but goes up quite high. You can see it from the kitchen window of my house. That's one of the reasons I'm moving. It was that hill we were climbing when it happened. We had just reached the top, when Robert turned and to me with a sudden look of utter terror on his face. I asked him what was wrong; he just screamed and pushed me away. I fell hard onto the ground, and could do nothing but watch as my son ran off up the hill.

And then... And then... This is the part I can't put into words. I'm going to try, but whatever you think of when you read this is not going to be what happened; it will just be the closest I can describe before thinking about it too much gives me a migraine. The closest I can say is this: the sky ate him.

He didn't fall, or fly, or take-off. There wasn't anything in the sky that took him. It wasn't a hand that reached out and grabbed him, it was the sky itself, the whole sky, as far as the horizon I could see, that twisted around and moved like... like the shifting of sand. It ate Robert. That's the only way I can describe it. Please don't make me do so again.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

Before I address the central point of this statement, namely the question of... whether the sky can eat people, there are a few other facts that need to be addressed. Firstly, the company that Ms. Kelly states Robert worked for, Open Skydiving, does not exist, and as far as Sasha's research can determine, never has. It appears in no company register and has no entries within any of the bodies that deal with the immense number of licences a skydiving business would require. There were one or two news articles from late 2000 that reference events by Open Skydiving, or sometimes the Open Skydiving School, but whatever they were, they were not an officially licensed business, so either they were lying to Robert Kelly, or he was lying to his mother.

Not a lot of detail was given about the skydive where Robert Kelly claims to have been transported to an endless sky blue nothing, but Tim really outdid himself here, and after spending almost a day combing through accident and incident reports for the Doncaster area in June 2002, found one that seems relevant. On the 3rd of June 2002, Joseph Puce reported hearing an impact in the field adjoining his house. Upon investigation, he found a parachute had hit the ground at high speed, partially burying itself in the earth. There was no sign of any body, or anyone who might have been wearing it, nor did it have any logo or label, and in Tim's follow-up interview Mr. Puce vehemently denied there being any planes or skydiving taking place anywhere near his property. The parachute was unopened.

According to police reports, Ms. Kelly attempted to report Robert missing on 7th of June, but it proved difficult, due to an absence of any information on friends or residences. In fact, for the four years prior, it's hard to find any evidence for Robert Kelly's existence at all. It may just be that he moved

around a lot, but it feels like more than that. Ms. Kelly declined our request for a follow-up interview, saying she had no desire to revisit the incident.

One other thing bothers me. If Ms. Kelly's recollections are correct, regarding how Robert described his last skydive, Harriet Fairchild the instructor and an old man named Simon. It might just be a coincidence, but I recall the name 'Simon Fairchild' was one of the ones used by...

[A door opens and a chair crashes to the ground]

JONATHAN SIMS

My god! Martin?!

[Wet squirming and squelching]

JONATHAN SIMS

What... What the hell is—? What are these things?!

[CLICK]

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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