

## **Episode 73: Matt crashed his plane in the wilderness**

Personally, I've never had a fear of flying. In fact, I really like it. I'm not sure if it's the flying itself, or maybe it's the fact that the flying just means I'm probably going somewhere to see people or have fun. But I've never had that feeling like "Oh...what if the plane just falls from the sky and we all die." I don't think I've ever worried about that. Which might be kind of odd, since I do have a fear of heights, but that only started after I fell off a roof. But that's another story.

And if you're on a flight and you're sitting next to someone who is just terrified, it doesn't really matter if you tell them how safe it is to fly in an airplane. I mean, there are around 100,000 flights that happen every single day all around the world. There's really nothing to be afraid of.

But what if you're on a flight...and there is actually cause for concern? Like, the pilot sees a thunderstorm ahead that you'll be flying through, or maybe something is not working right on the plane, and he makes the announcement that the plane might be in trouble. That would probably scare most people.

That's what happened on a commercial flight from Phoenix to Dallas a couple of years ago. The pilot didn't say what the problem was specifically, but he came over the intercom and gave the passengers the instructions to brace for impact. This is the actual audio from that flight.

### **Pilot**

You will need to be seated in a brace position for landing. To brace, place your feet flat on the floor, cross your wrists and hold on to the seat back in front of you. Rest your hands on your wrists. For those passengers seated in a full row, that's row 1 and row 4, place your feet flat on the floor, bend over and place your face in your lap, put your arms under your legs and grasp your elbows. Brace!

### **Flight attendants in background**

Brace! Brace! Everyone brace! Heads down! Keep your heads down!

### **First Officer**

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the first officer. Please remain seated while we take a look at the issue we have up here in the cockpit. No need for alarm. Just remain calm and we'll get back to you as soon as we know more. Thank you.

Fortunately, the pilot was able to land the plane safely and no one was injured. But I'm guessing a few prayers went up, and some phone calls were made to loved ones. Can you imagine how happy those passengers must have been when they finally felt the wheels touch down on that runway, and they knew they were safe.

My conversation today is with Matt. Matt is a licensed airplane pilot. And there was one day when he was flying a small plane, and it was just him – no passengers. He took off and got up to cruising altitude, and for a while everything seemed fine. What Matt didn't know was...that plane would **never** touch down on an airport runway again.

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### **Scott**

Was this plane that you were flying that day, was it owned by you or was it a rental or company owned?

**Matt**

I was pilot in command of my own aircraft when I crashed over the remote forest of Quebec.

**Scott**

Now, the average person doesn't own their own plane. Is this a business? I understand your primary business has something to do with flight training correct?

**Matt**

It is today. That's an outcome from this crash actually. Flying has been a passion of mine starting when I was a child flying with my father. At the time of the crash I was working as an executive for an iron ore company that was head of operation in Labrador, Canada. My professional career at that point was as an entrepreneur in the mining space, but since this crash I've worked hard to take my passion of aviation and education as well to become a flight instructor since then.

**Scott**

So the flight that day originated in Newfoundland, is that right?

**Matt**

That morning it did. It was really the culmination of a business trip that started a few days earlier in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. It was a beautiful time of year to fly. I remember the flight from northern Minnesota to Labrador, which is part of the province of Newfoundland, was a wonderful trip that included a stop in Duluth, Minnesota. We happened to be there while the Blue Angels were there and met some of those pilots.

I then flew to North Bay, Ontario, and then on to Wabush, Labrador. So I was flying over very remote terrain, but it was particularly good weather and beautiful terrain. I had business meetings for a few days in Wabush and then I was on my flight back home. The flight itself was from Wabush to Quebec City, for refueling and then I was going to continue on to the Midwest of the United States from there.

**Scott**

How long of a flight was this expected to be?

**Matt**

This was expected to be a 2 hour flight from Wabush Airport in Labrador to the Quebec City International Airport in Quebec.

**Scott**

Is it standard to check engines before every flight? Or what kind of pre-flight check do you have as far as mechanical things?

**Matt**

Having your own airplane you have an advantage where you are responsible and intimate to everything that happens to it. In my case, this plane was maintained meticulously. It was a higher time engine and that's part of why it was undergoing engine checks and the maintenance it was on. The typical checks involve oil changes every 25 hours, oil analysis at every oil change, compression checks on the cylinders, and bore scopes on the cylinders everytime. Just to catch any sort of anomaly each time that you have the engine visible.

That's your intermittent maintenance, but then before every flight there's a pre-flight. You check the entire airplane over, you check your oil, fuel, making sure there's no water in the fuel. Then in this particular aircraft, it was a modern aircraft that had a full engine monitoring system on it. I could see the cylinder temperature, exhaust temperature, oil pressure and fuel flow of that engine.

One mistake that I tell my students and other pilots that I made in this particular flight over remote terrain, is I was not performing my scans. I wasn't scanning my engine instruments as often as I could. I may have had as much as 5-10 minutes in between my last scan. I don't really know when I saw the anomalies; if they'd just happened or if they had been going on 5 or 10 minutes earlier. It's an error in judgment and performance that I try to use as a teaching moment for students of mine. Potentially that could have given me a more advantageous outcome than where I ended up crashing.

Just walking through the flight, it was another beautiful and warm day, which is quite rare that far north. No wind, clear skies, did the pre-flight, took off, the plane was performing as normal. I leveled off at 8,000 feet and was on my cruise flight to intersect a waypoint at Saint Lawrence River, then I was going to make a right hand turn to the southwest to follow the waterway into Quebec City.

I was only about 30 minutes into the flight when I looked up to do my scan and I saw that my oil temperature and pressure were significantly off. The plane was still performing normal and sounding normal, but I'd flown that plane enough that I knew something was drastically wrong as soon as I saw that. Human nature has a delay involved. You kind of want to not believe what you're seeing.

**Scott**

You don't have the luxury of denial for very long right?

**Matt**

Not very long, exactly. I had a little bit of delay and then I quickly radioed air traffic control, I was in radio contact the whole time. I told them there was an issue and I needed to divert to the nearest airport.

I was quickly running calculations in my head. With the wind aloft direction to see if it was closer to return to where I came from or if I needed to go a different way. The quickest time was to divert to Sept-Îles, which means "Seven Islands" in French, it's a significant city that's on the Saint Lawrence. It was farther away from where Wabush, the airport I originated from, was at; but I had a tail-wind. If I would've turned around it would've taken me longer.

So that's what I was doing immediately, letting air traffic control know I needed to divert, then their next question was, "Ok, where do you want to divert to?" and I was running the calculations quickly in my head of what would be the quickest time. Unfortunately, my closest option was still about 25 minutes away.

I think deep down intellectually I knew that I probably didn't have 25 minutes, but the plane was still performing. I was fixated on the engine instruments, watching them to see if they were going to tick in the right direction and stabilize. Probably a minute later my temperature ticked up

higher and my pressure ticked down lower. That's when reality hit that I did not have 25 minutes to go.

The next action was to take out the charts and I started studying what type of terrain I had in front of me. I was in the middle of absolutely nowhere. For anyone who's been into Quebec, it's a beautiful place but they have massive reservoirs because they have a huge hydroelectric power system. So there are lots of extremely large bodies of water. Even at that time of the year the water temperature was quite cold. So my immediate concern was, "If I'm gonna go down, I don't want to go down in the middle of a big lake." Otherwise I would face getting to shore, having hypothermia, losing the survival equipment I had both electronic and practical. I knew that it would be over for me if I went down in a water reservoir.

The airplane went from, besides the engine instruments reading bad but performing normally, it instantaneously went to catastrophic failure of the engine. There was a huge loud grinding noise. At that point I was traveling 180 miles an hour through the air, so the air has enough force to keep the propeller rotating but it's very noisy. There was mechanical grinding and screeching with lots of vibration.

You have a moment of denial there as well. You freeze for a moment. The first thing they teach you when you're becoming a pilot is to fly the airplane first, don't lose control of the airplane. Some people think you lose an engine and the plane falls out of the sky; that's not the case. Airplanes are really just gliders with an engine in the front of them, and every plane glides differently. So as long as you control the airplane you can have some amount of control within a distance of where you're going to go down.

The engine failed and I was focused on flying, or gliding, the airplane. I noticed that I had a big water reservoir right in front of me and I had a tailwind behind me. The first thing I started to do was execute a 180 degree turn so that I didn't get blown into the water reservoir. At the same time I was talking over the radio saying, "Mayday" and declaring an emergency and that I had engine failure and was going down. I was managing the aerionics to be able to quickly bring up the GPS coordinates.

At that point in time my biggest concern was being rescued. I figured I was probably going to get down safely, because I was flying an airplane with a ballistic parachute on it. I was really worried about being rescued in time, so I really wanted them to know my exact coordinates. At the same time I had a satellite messaging phone and GPS that was portable. While I was flying the plane I was trying to talk on the phone and work the aerionics and trying to stuff a large phone into my pocket. It was like a Zac Morris cell phone or a large foot phone, we all know what those look like and how big they are (laughs). Especially compared to the modern iPhones. So I was trying to get that into my pants pocket.

All those things were happening simultaneously as I was executing a 180 degree turn back over the wilderness and the woods as opposed to over the water.

### **Scott**

You mentioned that the plane has a parachute. How do you know when to deploy that parachute?

### **Matt**

When to deploy the parachute is a very important topic that's part of the training in flying this type of airplane. If you're too low and you deploy the parachute, there's not enough time for the parachute to inflate. If you're too high and you have a hazard, in my case I had this reservoir that I wanted to avoid, as soon as you pull the parachute you lose control of the airplane and you fall where Mother Nature and the wind is taking you.

For me it was a calculation I was doing. I didn't want to pull too high and get blown into the water. I didn't want to pull too low and crash into the ground. I waited until I felt like I was far enough away from the shoreline of this reservoir yet still high enough to pull it. I decided to pull the chute at about 2500 feet above the ground.

What happens when you pull the parachute is it's actually rocket propelled. I pulled it and instantly it sounded and smelled like a large firework going off. I could smell the sulfur and the fuel. I was probably traveling at about 110 miles per hour at that point and it felt just like if you imagine going down the freeway at 90 miles an hour and slamming on the brakes in a sports car as fast as you can. That was the type of deceleration I had and everything in the airplane that wasn't secured flew to the front of the plane.

The first phase of the parachute deployment you're looking straight down at the ground. So the nose of the airplane is straight down as the parachute is deploying and as what they call the "line cutters" are cutting some of the lines to bring the airplane back horizontal. So you're sitting there looking at the ground for probably 5 seconds and then you flip back up to a horizontal pitch attitude, where I'm now basically looking at this horizon of trees coming at me. The descent rate with that parachute is about 25 miles per hour. Since I pulled the parachute at 2500 feet, when I went horizontal and I could see the tree line coming at me I was probably 500-1000 feet above the trees at that moment.

### **Scott**

So from the time you pulled the chute to when you hit land, how much time had passed?

### **Matt**

Probably 25 seconds or so, if I had to guess. Probably 15 seconds from when I went horizontal and saw the trees coming at me to when I was on the ground. That was a very long 15 seconds, as you could imagine. One thing, that I still don't know why I was doing it and it ended up being a miracle that I wasn't killed when I fell; for some reason I kept looking out the front of the airplane. Normally when you fly a small plane like this and you want to see the ground you look out to the side of the airplane. I was on the captain driver's side of the airplane, and normally I'd be looking out the side window down at the ground if I wanted to see it. In this case I just kept looking out the front and I don't know why. Had I not done that I would have been killed on the impact.

I was looking out the front and the tips of the trees were getting closer and closer and as soon as I started dipping the tree line there was a massive "BOOM!" of an explosion of bark in the airplane. I could see out of the very periphery of my eye some very quick movement to my left in front of my shoulder. A moment later I impacted the ground. At that point I was just focused on getting out of the plane and avoiding an explosion or fire, so I unbuckled my seat belt and jumped out. As I got away from the plane and looked back at it I could see there was a massive tree that went right through the bottom of it right through the pilot side footwell. The next thing I did was look down at my leg to see if I was injured, and I was bleeding but minorly, it wasn't a serious injury.

The tree had come through the bottom of the plane and actually cut my leg, but just a half inch in either direction would have meant death. Best case scenario I would have been cut seriously and bled to death. Worst case I would have been instantly impaled in a bloody mangled mess when the rescuers came to find the plane.

**Scott**

I imagine you've thought about that many times, how close you came there.

**Matt**

Yeah, absolutely. Many times. Each time I think about it it's a reminder and I'm overcome with gratitude just to be alive. I came literally millimeters from dying in the woods. I would have preferred to actually be impaled. I've thought a lot about what would have been better, instant death would've been way better because a slow death alone with no one around is hard to imagine how horrible that would have been.

**Scott**

Is it possible that the tree slowed the fall of the plane to the ground?

**Matt**

Oh 100% it did.

**Scott**

Did you still hit pretty hard?

**Matt**

No, I hit very gently actually. I probably went from 25 miles an hour to hitting the ground at 5 miles an hour. I had no whiplash or anything. It was a very gentle ride down. It was like a toothpick through a soggy meatball; it just went right through and rode it right down.

When I hopped out of the plane and looked back I could see the tree sticking right through the plane and I could still see my avionics were turned on and humming and I was just by myself. That's when I had the first real moment of anxiety I'd say. Up until that point I had tunnel vision, focused on what was in front of me. As I looked back at the plane I started to feel in my pocket for the GPS I was trying to put in my pocket that I felt was my lifeline. It wasn't in my pocket. That moment was when I had the first wave of terror and fear that I may not get out of there.

**Scott**

Yeah, without that how do you tell anyone where you are? Even if you knew where you were roughly, somebody else has to find you unless you're going to walk out.

**Matt**

That's exactly right. This particular summer, about a year and a half ago, there were quite a few crashes in Quebec unfortunately. In many places, if a plane goes down remotely, even if it's in radar contact, that radar contact is not extremely precise. When you have extremely dense forest and only a general area of where a plane is, for many people it took days and days or weeks and weeks to find these crashed planes. My view was that if I didn't have a way to communicate with anybody then I had in a best case scenario several days but in a worst case weeks. Given the heat and being pretty dehydrated to start the day as it was, I didn't think I'd have a few days. I thought it would come down to dehydration if nothing else.

That was the moment of peak fear and terror when I didn't have that GPS in my pocket. I didn't know if it had fallen out of the plane, was destroyed by the tree or under the plane. As I was looking back at the plane I could see the fuel gushing out, so it could have been underneath the wing getting doused by fuel. So that's when I was the most scared.

### **Scott**

A lot of people, I would imagine, in that particular situation would just go into shock and not know what to do or just not do anything. It sounds like you still had your wits about you. Had you had survival training at all prior to this?

### **Matt**

I had not had survival training but I had one previous in flight incident, emergency actually. It resulted in me landing the airplane just fine but it was an emergency I declared a year or two earlier. I knew from that experience that there's two ways a person can react. It's the same fight or flight syndrome that everyone has. In the case of flying an airplane, the flight syndrome is when people freeze. You read about people taking off and something happens and they have time to do something but they don't, they lock up, that's responding with a flight reflex. Fighting it is what I was doing, both in my previous emergency and in this case, where there is still a little freezing and anxiety and terror but still thinking through the sequence and fighting the scenario and problem solving.

When I realized that GPS was not in my pocket I had a wave of terror that I had to fight back from being paralyzed and freezing. I fought it off and tried to think, "What do I do next?" My instant reaction was to run back to the plane and start looking at it but I knew that the fuel was spilling everywhere and that the electronics were still on. I had not turned off the electronic systems like I should have done, that's part of an emergency checklist but I didn't get that done with everything happening.

I was very concerned about an explosion or a fire so I forced myself to take a few minutes and just think about the situation. I thought, "Do I need to rush back to the plane right now, does it even make a difference? If the GPS is destroyed it's not going to make a difference if I go back now or wait a few minutes until the rest of the fuel runs out and the electric systems die down." It was hard but I was able to force myself to problem solve the situation.

I ended up waiting 5-10 minutes just to let the rest of the fuel spill out of the wings. Then I made the determination to start walking back to the plane and start looking for the GPS. When I went back to the plane I was fortunate enough to find the GPS sitting on the seat. It was no different than a cell phone falling out of your pocket in the car. I went back to the plane and there it was just sitting right there on the pilot side seat. So I went from terror and trying to manage the paralyzing fear to feeling almost like a million bucks or like I won the lottery.

It took me some effort, I had to climb up a hillside to find an opening, but I was able to get to a spot where I could start messaging and I was pretty quickly in contact with search and rescue and air traffic control. I was able to basically text message my coordinates and let them know that I had an SOS. At that point I took my iPad out and started vlogging. I don't know exactly what I was thinking or why I did it. I think what got me going on it was that this was going to be a crazy thing to document and be able to share with people, in terms of some positive learning that could come out of it; that was initially why. Then as the day went on it also became quite

therapeutic. I was just sitting by myself out in the woods all day and I didn't have a volleyball or "Wilson" to keep me company, I had my iPad to vlog the thing.

**Scott**

That's exactly the image that came, when you said that, that's the image that came to my mind was "Wilson" where Tom Hanks had somebody to talk to.

**Matt**

Exactly. Afterwards, when I could digest and had experienced the full rescue, I really wanted to put something together to give thanks to the search and rescue teams and give them credit for what they did since I got to see it firsthand. When you get to see when your life is in people's hands and they step up and save your life, it made me want to spend the time to put a video together and give them thanks and highlight their efforts.

**Scott**

What was your inventory as far as supplies for being able to survive and have somebody come and find you?

**Matt**

They weren't sufficient. Part of my lessons learned was that I had one bottle of water, and that was the biggest issue. At this point in the game, I'd crashed, it was hot outside in July, I had to hike through the forest up a hillside to text. Once an hour went by and I could take inventory of where I was at I was just dripping with sweat. As thirsty as you could ever imagine yourself in a normal circumstance, I was already feeling that way an hour in. So water was a major issue. That's was my biggest mistake.

My second mistake was that I wasn't dressed for the occasion. When I got out of the plane, I had been flying in shorts and flip flops, I had one flip flop on and the other was gone. I could feel the soft moss on my feet and I wasn't prepared to be stuck in the woods. I also had to crawl through this thick bed, so I was very conscious of even getting a cut on my foot or something that could be my demise. So I was not prepared at all to be flying over that terrain.

Those were the bad things. The good things I had got me out. My GPS messenger, a kit to start a fire which I ultimately had to use for a smoke signal, and I had to dig into my luggage to cover myself head to toe since I didn't have a bug net. I couldn't even describe how bad the bugs were. It was like flies on shit. I was covered head to toe on every inch of my body with bugs. That probably could have been the demise of somebody just from the allergic reaction to hundreds of bites. I had to crawl my luggage out of the plane and break it open to make use of something to create a bug barrier.

**Scott**

How far were you from any city or town? Were you in any kind of flight path where someone might notice you by chance?

**Matt**

I was probably 60 nautical miles from the nearest human. In fact, I joke with people that I don't think a human being had ever been where I was at. It was extremely remote. For any search and rescue to get over to me took a period of time, even after my text messages the turbine aircraft was circling above trying to find me. I had my messenger so I was texting and they were saying, "We think we know where you are but we still can't see you."

Keep in mind they had actually received my exact GPS coordinates from my GPS, this aircraft was circling overhead, there was an aircraft and parachute in the trees; yet the forest was so dense they could not locate me. It was a helpless feeling, I'm sitting there seeing this airplane circle above me and I'm looking at my messenger and they're saying they haven't spotted me yet, over and over. That's when I decided to go back and get the kit and start a fire.

**Scott**

Right because the smoke would rise up above the trees and obviously they could see that.

**Matt**

Yeah, exactly.

**Scott**

Who was it you actually contacted for rescue?

**Matt**

I'd say another lesson learned on the positive side that I use in teaching students is that several flights earlier I'd used the messenger to test it while I was in the air. I'd worked with air traffic control to figure out if I was on the ground who to contact. It actually ended up being a pretty obscure email address that I used for the messaging. That was my first point of contact to Canadian Air Traffic Control was to an email address that they'd given me. Little did I know that that email went to a desk with a person sitting in Montreal. That was my first message.

The second message was to my father to let him know that I was on the ground and that I was seriously injured. A fear in the back of my mind was thinking about my wife and my family hearing that I crashed and then the uncertainty of whether I was alive or injured. Those were the first few messages I sent.

Air traffic control contacted and coordinated with the Royal Airforce of Canada. They had an initial search and rescue airplane that came from nearby, the one circling over that couldn't see me. Then they were coordinating with a SAR group, Search and Rescue technicians, out of Halifax, Nova Scotia. That was the team that ultimately scaled out of the helicopter and pulled me out of the woods from Halifax.

**Scott**

How long from the time you crashed until you actually got rescued?

**Matt**

I believe I crashed at about 9:25 in the morning and was rescued at about 3:30 in the afternoon.

**Scott**

What do you do for 6 hours? After you've contacted someone to tell them, then you just wait, but how do you fill that time?

**Matt**

You sit and wait. In my case I did a lot of praying and a lot of reflecting. It was actually a pretty peaceful time for me, that time in between. At this point I had been in contact with people, I had taken care of the bugs by getting covered head to toe in clothing, my only discomfort at that time was that I was extremely thirsty and dehydrated. I found a shade on the hillside and I just layed

back and listened to the wind and the leaves, watched the sunlight coming through the leaves, and listened to the different birds and animals. I was just sitting back waiting and reflecting and trying to figure out what this all meant for my life.

At that point I had 100% faith that I was going to get pulled out within a matter of hours at that point. The crash started with pure terror but at that point it was quite peaceful.

**Scott**

Can you describe the actual rescue process when they finally found you?

**Matt**

Yeah it was incredible. These people are incredible. It started with a Hercules aircraft flying over at low altitudes. It was awesome. I was in the middle of nowhere and I have a message that says the first phase is coming, I didn't know what that meant. I was laying back in the shade under the trees and I could just hear the rumble of an airplane coming. My heart started pounding and I started getting excited. I didn't know what they were going to do. Then you hear it getting closer and closer and instantly they're on top of you. They must have flown 50 feet above the treetops, it was crazy.

They did a pass and I could see the back of the transport aircraft was open and you could see people with lanyards hanging out the back trying to visually spot me. So I was up there waving my hands and screaming, like that would've made any difference, and then they went out and did another pass. They did a few more passes, then all of the sudden they did a pass and I saw a bunch of things get thrown out of the back of the plane and float down on little parachutes. One of them landed probably 100 yards from me and I could hear it beeping through the woods. Then I got a message saying they dropped a radio and I needed to go get the radio.

At this point I was just waiting and it was a peaceful prayerful time, but I was extremely dehydrated and on a pretty steep hillside with very thick brush. On top of that I knew that everytime I moved I risked cutting myself because I was barefooted. I actually had socks on but was basically barefoot. So I had no choice, I started hiking down the hillside towards the loud noise. It took me probably 25 minutes because it was really thick, but I got there. What's interesting is that along the way I actually found a piece of the airplane. There's a cover that covers the parachute and I came across it in the woods. In that whole open area I happened to walk right across it in the wilderness.

**Scott**

That's something that fell from the sky when you were still up there?

**Matt**

It fell somewhere around 8000 feet with 30 knot winds, and it happened to land exactly where I was walking across to find the radio.

**Scott**

Did that turn out to be an interesting souvenir?

**Matt**

Oh yeah. It's going to be a wall piece for the rest of my life for sure.

So I came across the radio and I heard the beeping. As I got closer to it I could hear, "Matt. Matt. Do you read? Matt, do you read? Do you copy?" I could hear it as I was getting closer to the radio, then I came on the radio and started talking to them. I told them, "Boy it's nice to hear someone else's voice."

So that was the first phase of the rescue. From that point he gave me instructions and said, "Look, I need you to hike back up to where you were and just stay put. The helicopter is coming to get you and he'll be here in 2 hours." I thought, "2 hours!?! Shit I thought you guys were going to be able to get me." But then he said, "Don't worry we are going to circle above you for two hours. So you'll be able to talk to me and we will be in contact the whole time."

I went back to the hillside to where all my stuff was and laid back down. I tried to relax and was really trying to control my sweating. It was very hot so I was trying to limit my water loss.

**Scott**

They couldn't have tossed down a bottle of water or something huh?

**Matt**

Yeah exactly. I joked about that when they pulled me up. No actually I told them on the radio. I said, "This radio is nice, but you guys couldn't have thrown some water down with a parachute?" At that point, your sense of humor kicks right back in. You're talking to somebody and you know that the rescue is coming. I'm sure you've talked to a lot of people who have gone through very traumatic stuff so at this point I feel bad even talking about it as a sad or traumatic story because at this point I was really just in pure joy. Despite the dehydration it was really just pure joy that I knew the end was near.

2 hours later the helicopter showed up and they could see me waving out from the tree side. I watched a guy hop out with a rope all the way down. I was sitting there really fixated on the second guy that was coming down and while I was staring up at the helicopter the first guy kind of surprised me in the woods. He was right on top of me all of the sudden and scared me a little bit. So he was right there and he looked at me and I looked at him and he stuck his hand out and I stuck mine out. We didn't say a word, we just shook hands.

Then the second gentleman, his name was Nikola Boujard I think, came down and the 2 of us just sat there for a second. We made some small talk about how they couldn't believe I wasn't injured after seeing the plane. The plane looked really bad with the tree through it. They were really shocked to see that I was standing upright. The next thing they said was, "Can you make it up the hill? There's a clearing at the top that we need to get up to?" I said, "Yeah absolutely. At this point I can do whatever you need."

What was kind of weird was that I was in this dense forest, yet they had instructed me that I could take all my belongings with me. I was like I was at an airport, I had my carry-on suitcase and my briefcase and my iPad while I was vlogging the whole thing. So I was hiking and they were helping me asking, "Can I take your suitcase?" I said, "Yeah you can take my suitcase, I'm pretty tired."

**Scott**

The question is, do you tip them when you get there? (laughs)

**Matt**

(Laughs) Absolutely you tip. I should have tipped them actually. I would've given them my whole wallet at that point.

So we hiked up and were carrying my baggage, my briefcase and my computer. We're talking on the same computer that went through the crash right now as we're having this interview. So we went to the top of the hill and the helicopter came over. The first thing they did when we were up there is they took a big smoke flash out and cut it off so a mass of pink smoke went up, you can see some of it in the video I put up on YouTube. Then they sent a bucket down for us. I climbed into the man cage, they threw my suitcase and my briefcase right on top of me, then they started pulling me up.

Normally I would have been scared shitless to do something like get pulled up into a helicopter, but at that point I was just so happy to be getting pulled up. It was just a breathtaking view. I couldn't believe how big the body of water that I avoided looked. If you look at the video online you'll see just what that kind of view looked like, it was awe inspiring.

So they pulled me up in the helicopter and then the 2 gentlemen came up after me and we started proceeding towards Sept-Îles. The first thing I said is, "Guys I need water." I think I drank 7 bottles of water in 60 seconds. They took my vitals, blood pressure, pulse, and blood oxygen levels. I was strapped to the medical gurney, so after I threw a headset on they said, "You look fine other than dehydration and a lot of bug bites."

At this point I was overjoyed. The closest feeling I can relate it to is, if you've had surgeries, that moment you wake up from a surgery and you know that you made it. There's this kind of joy that you have talking to the nurse and talking to the doctor. I had that same level of joy. We were cracking jokes and having a good time. The pilots were asking about the airplane and what kind it was and about the avionics and parachute. We were just a bunch of humans where we had a relationship now. I was completely reliant on them to save my life and they had done it. There was a bond and relationship in that helicopter as we were flying back that is hard to describe. I'm sure mostly for me since these guys do it everyday.

For them, most of their missions are seeing mangled bodies in airplanes burnt up from a fire. So it was a pretty unique experience for them as well that I was able to come out of there the way I did. It's nothing short of a miracle. From avoiding the death on the tree to everything falling into place to get out of there in time. Also having the resources coming to rescue me compelled me to make a public showing of thanksgiving. Lots and lots of people were involved in saving my life.

They took me to the airport that I was diverting to originally in Sept-Îles. I was met there with an ambulance and there were lots of people crowding around at the airport. I found out in hindsight that everybody had known what happened because there had been news reports that a plane went down but that the person had a parachute. It wasn't clear that the airplane had a parachute but they were saying that the pilot had jumped out with a parachute, so that's what everyone thought happened. News had gone out that the search and rescue plane had me in it, so there were some onlookers and different news media at the hospital when I got there in the ambulance.

They basically took me to the hospital, had me fill out a police report and that was it. I had a colleague come pick me up. He had also heard about it on the news, so when he showed up in

the hospital room and saw me there filthy, dirty, and muddy, he was pretty taken aback. He took me to his house and I called the equivalent of the NTSB up there to report the incident.

I also called a business colleague to come pick me up, I said, "Can you come fly your plane? I'd like to get home." I had to wait 7 hours for an aircraft to come from Minnesota for an aircraft to charter in and come pick me up. I was fortunate that I was able to, late that night, hop into an airplane and jump into the front seat as copilot and we flew back to the US. I got home at about 3 in the morning.

**Scott**

Talk about getting back on the horse. One of my questions was 'how soon did you fly again after this?' and it was pretty much the same day.

**Matt**

Same day. I wasn't a pilot in command, but I was there. I ended up going up by myself I think about a month after. There is definitely anxiety involved in getting back into the same kind of airplane. There was a moment where I had to kind of make a decision as to whether I was going to hang it up because of the anxiety or not. I knew that I loved to fly though and that's when it kind of solidified in my mind that I wanted to do this professionally. I want to help and teach others how to fly and experience the joy of it and the wonderful things that personal and general aviation can do for people.

For me hopping into a professionally piloted airplane that day didn't feel like flying, I just wanted to get home. When some time passed and I had a few nights sleep dreaming about it and reliving the trauma, then making the decision a month later on whether or not to go up again. That's really where the decision to get back on the horse happened. I made the decision at that point that I wanted to do this the rest of my life as long as, God willing, I'm healthy and able to do it.

In addition to still doing work in the mining industry I'm now running an accelerated flight training business. I focus on teaching students the practical aspects of flying. A lot of what I focus on is the types of things you wouldn't learn in a flight school. Things like thinking about the terrain you're flying over, packing clothing, all the scenarios that can happen if you lose an engine. I'm trying to do the best I can to take everything I learned in that moment and apply it to training other pilots to be safe. Hopefully, God forbid, if a similar situation happens people might have some training ahead of time.

**Scott**

You have a unique perspective on planning for something like this, whereas other people might just think of it as another chapter in the course. With you it's from firsthand experience.

**Matt**

Absolutely. I think most pilots, and I was one of them, especially if you're flying quite a bit, you never think you're going to have an engine failure. You never think it's going to happen to you so you don't plan as much as you should for it.

**Scott**

Statistically it is a rarity, right?

**Matt**

It is a rarity.

**Scott**

Most pilots will never experience this?

**Matt**

It's very rare. Aviation is a pretty safe way to travel, even personal aviation. The vast majority of incidents are really pilot error, not an unexpected mechanical failure. It is rare but it does happen, even partial failures can happen quite a bit too. I had a catastrophic failure where I lost all engine power, but what happens if you have something that breaks in the engine and you have 30% power? If you're prepared for it and you don't freeze, you fly the airplane, and stay proficient at certain things with certain planning; the likelihood of getting down safely is extremely high.

That's one aspect that has been very positive coming out of this. The other aspect I'm still trying to figure out and pray about and figure out what else I can do with this second chance. I don't quite have that figured out yet. That's still an incomplete part of the story. I still feel that I was given a chance to survive that day and avoid that tree instantly killing me. I pray to God that I get guidance and wisdom and inspiration to serve that purpose and serve him in that way someday and somehow.

**Scott**

Have you talked to the people that rescued you since that day?

**Matt**

You know it's interesting, I did talk directly with one of the SAR techs, Nikola. We both did a radio interview in Quebec City about a month after the accident. I got to hear his voice and had a little bit of an exchange with him that was really nice.

Then a really feel-good story happened after. I got a phone call out of the blue from a Montreal number and it was a person that works at NavCanada, the air traffic control facility. He said, "We have a supervisor that's just getting done with training, and she is getting promoted. She was the person that coordinated your whole search effort. Would you be willing, Matt, to call into a conference room at this time when we are about to announce that she has been given this big promotion?" I said, "Absolutely."

So they gave me the number and the exact minute to call. I called the cell phone and she picked it up on speaker phone and I just said, "This is Matt, and I want to congratulate you on this wonderful promotion and thank you for helping save my life." You could hear a lot of clapping and cheers. Things got a little bit emotional on the phone. That was the second chance I had to talk with somebody involved.

**Scott**

Is the plane still there?

**Matt**

It was actually removed. They sent helicopters in to log the trees around it to have an open spot. Then they sent another helicopter in to pull it out. It was relatively easy to pull out because all of the straps that the parachute was hooked to they could just use to yank it out of the woods with the helicopter. I have video, there's snippets up on my YouTube as well, of me going back

and visiting the airplane and meeting a lot of the gentlemen that pulled it out. I looked at the engine and looked at the plane.

The cell phone I'm still using came out of the plane, so I lost my cell phone but they found it with the plane (laughs). I got most of my headsets back, but a porcupine had chewed one of them up to pieces and animals had obviously been rummaging through the plane. It probably could have been repaired and airworthy, but because of the remote location it ended up being salvaged for avionics and parts. If it would have happened in a closer proximity to a repair center it actually could have been fully repaired and flown again. November 6 Niner Niner Sierra is no longer out there.

### **Scott**

Coming so close to death like you did, how does that affect you from a mental aspect? Do you do things differently now than you did before?

### **Matt**

Absolutely. I'm really grateful that this happened to me for that reason. Before this incident my priorities were way out of whack. I was very selfishly focused and maximized my efforts on flying when I wanted to and work. I was living pretty unhealthy too, drinking a lot, eating unhealthy and not exercising. Whatever time and energy I had left over, which oftentimes wasn't a lot, that was for my wife and kids. After that it put everything in a completely different perspective. I'm grateful that it happened to me for that reason.

Obviously I survived. There's a little bit of stress and bad dreams that come out of it but everytime that happens and everytime I talk to people like this I'm left with a feeling of gratitude and just being thankful. Lots of people have had terrible things that happened to them and I feel guilty that I was able to have a traumatic thing happen to me but that it turned out the way it did. I know people who have been in bad car accidents, and you've talked to a lot of them, they have life changing injuries and illnesses. I'm sitting here healthy and I feel bad about that.

So many people go through so many different things and so much different adversity. We all have different adversity in life and this was one moment that I had to go through. I just pray that there is good that I can pass along from it and I try to be as grateful as possible that it turned out the way it did and I'm still here.

The biggest advice I'd have for anyone that's gone through a traumatic event is, there are definitely elements of various discretion in choice involved. You can choose to let some anxiety and fear stay with it, or you can make the choice to go a different path. For example, it happens a lot of the time with flying. A student might get very scared or have a scary experience flying and lots of students stop flying after they have their first nerve racking experience.

Fear is often a short term emotion or something that you can experience but it doesn't have to define the decisions that you make as much as a lot of people allow it to. Making the choice to live life to the fullest, sounds cliché, but count your blessings, be grateful for everything, and realize that we all go through our own types of adversity. It's common. I don't know a single person in the world that hasn't had a serious tragedy or adversity they've had to manage in life. It's a common thing we all share as humans. We have adversity, trauma and fear. To a certain extent we all have a choice on how we move forward after those events happen.

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If you want to see the video that Matt did immediately after the crash, which includes him getting rescued into the helicopter, you can see that in the show notes at [WhatWasThatLike.com/73](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/73).

And Raw Audio episode 11 is now live. If you love hearing the actual 911 call audio, and the story that goes with it, every Raw Audio episode has THREE of those. In the new episode, 4 very young children run to a neighbor for help

### **911 Dispatch**

What's going on?

### **Caller**

I just got 4 kids at my door, somebody just killed their mama.

There's an accidental shooting at a Halloween party

### **Caller**

Alright, there's a young child here and she has been shot by a firearm.

And a homeowner goes outside to confront someone stealing his truck

### **911 Dispatch**

Ok, so who was it that got shot?

### **Caller**

The person trying to steal the truck.

The exclusive Raw Audio episodes are available to anyone who supports the What Was That Like podcast for just \$5 a month. You can do that at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/support), and I deeply appreciate it!

Now here's a question for you. You probably listen to several podcasts. What would make you immediately unsubscribe from a podcast?

That was the question posted recently in our private Facebook group, and we had quite a lively discussion about it! Some of the answers included mouth noises, co-host banter that's unrelated to the podcast topic, hosts that talk about politics on a non-political podcast, and one person even said she's unsubscribed from a show because the host was EATING while doing the podcast! I don't think I've ever heard that happen on a podcast, but I'd say that would be a deal breaker for me too.

If you'd like to join in on these great discussions we have over in the Facebook group, we'd love to have you! You can join at [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook). And you should do that right now, because pretty soon we're gonna set up a Zoom call just for listeners of this podcast, and that's where I'll announce it – in that Facebook group. So get in there and make sure you don't miss it.

I've got a bunch of great stories lined up for the weeks ahead and I'm really excited to share them with you. I'll let you in on a little secret, little behind-the-curtain stuff for the show. Never in my life have I had a problem with sleeping. When my head hits the pillow, I'm out within minutes. But when it's a Thursday night before a Friday new episode day, I'll admit I sometimes

have some trouble dozing off because I'm so hyped up about getting that new story out to you. But that's my problem, I can handle it.

In the meantime, stay safe – and I'll see you in two weeks.