

## **Episode 167: Chris was not strapped in**

You ever watch a video on YouTube, or TikTok, and it shows someone walking right on the edge at the top of a very tall building?

Or maybe they're right at the edge of a cliff with a steep drop off, and they're doing flips or some stupid thing, just to get views and show how fearless they are.

Every time I see one of those, I get this weird feeling in my gut because I think about the risk that they're taking, and the horrifying outcome if they make just one little mistake.

I wasn't always afraid of heights. As a kid, I was on the roof of our house all the time. But as an adult I fell off a roof, and since then – I avoid high places.

That's why I'll most likely never go hang gliding. It actually does look like it would be an incredible experience, just flying silently through the air. But my mind would always go back to the thought of what could go wrong, and that kind of destroys the moment.

My guest in this episode, Chris, went hang gliding and he found out exactly what could go wrong. It was his first time, and he was flying with an experienced hang gliding pilot. When they took flight, Chris realized he was not strapped in – his pilot had forgotten to attach him to the hang glider.

This is a Flashback episode. Chris originally told this story a few years back here on the podcast, so after you hear his story I'll play a recent conversation I had with him so you can hear what's happened since then. And I asked him – have you ever gone hang gliding again?

And hang around to the end, because I've recently discovered a podcast that I think you'll really enjoy.

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### **Scott**

Before this happened, did you ever have any kind of close brush with death before?

### **Chris**

No, never. That was my first time experiencing anything as crazy as that.

### **Scott**

And hopefully the last, right?

### **Chris**

Yeah, yeah.

### **Scott**

You live here in Florida, which is actually not too far from me. I'm just up in the Tampa Bay area. So, yeah, we're not too far. But this happened in Switzerland, right?

### **Chris**

Yes.

**Scott**

Okay, so you were, like, on vacation. In fact, I think this was the first day of your vacation.

**Chris**

Yeah, my wife and I like to travel to different places, and coming to Switzerland was on our bucket list. We usually do something that's interesting on vacation. Normally, it would be zip lining. We've zip-lined in 4 or 5 different countries - it's something that we've always done. We've been on a hot air balloon before - she got me a skydiving trip for my 40th birthday. So, we've gone to the air a few times. This time, she was looking into hang gliding and said, "Do you want to do that?" And I'm like, "Sounds cool!" Let's do it!"

**Scott**

It sounds like you both are, kind of, adventure seekers.

**Chris**

Nothing crazy. Ziplining is pretty safe. Hot air balloon was awesome - I love that. Floating up effortlessly was cool. Hang gliding was just another part of something like that. So, that's the only thing we actually set ahead of time when we went to Switzerland. The rest of the trip would just be exploring.

**Scott**

The common theme among all those things is heights. So obviously, neither of you has a fear of heights. I actually bungee jumped once.

**Chris**

I haven't done that yet.

**Scott**

You gotta try that - it's pretty cool. What I found interesting was that adrenaline doesn't leave your body very quickly. I had a hard time sleeping then. she got to Switzerland. I assumed you had probably booked this hang gliding trip ahead of time, right? You had a reservation?

**Chris**

Yeah, the hang gliding reservation was the only thing we did ahead of time. My wife found and picked it out. Everything was cool on the website. The safety rating was good. Like, we always check out safety ratings and all the reviews were great. So, we looked at them.

**Scott**

Does the service that you use have several pilots? Or is this, like, a one-man operation? How is it set up?

**Chris**

There are several pilots. I think it's just a matter of luck of who you would get that day. The owner wasn't actually at the facility - I think he was on vacation - so, we got 2 of the other pilots and they were great. They picked us up at the hotel. They had another couple of guys that just finished up their flight and were raving about it. The guy in front of me said that this was the coolest thing he's ever done - he's done a lot of things. So, we're all psyched up. Once we drop them off, we started heading to the place to go get the gliders and the other pilot.

**Scott**

So you and your wife were going to be hang gliding?

**Chris**

We both did. We had 2 pilots go up in 2 hang gliders.

**Scott**

Okay, all right. I didn't realize that.

**Chris**

She had a beautiful flight.

**Scott**

Okay, do you have any idea how experienced your pilot was?

**Chris**

They both talked about it. There was one guy - my pilot said he was doing it for, like, 10-12 years. So, I was just going by what they say.

**Scott**

Well, and there's some kind of license involved too, right?

**Chris**

Oh, yeah. I think somebody said, at one point, that my pilot did some time training or worked at other places in Orlando that does this.

**Scott**

Oh, okay. There's a hang gliding place in Orlando?

**Chris**

There are several in Florida. There are no hills to jump off in Florida.

**Scott**

That's what I was thinking - there are no hills.

**Chris**

Yeah. There are little airplanes that pull you up and then you release the cable.

**Scott**

Okay. So before you got on this flight, did either you or your wife have any kind of hesitation or bad feeling about this at all?

**Chris**

No, not really. Before we left on the trip, I thought it was odd that I started getting really sharp pains in my right hand. I don't know if that has to do with anything. Before we left for the trip, I was talking to her and I was like, "Oh, my God, what is wrong with my hand? It's just shooting pain all of a sudden." It happened, like, twice and I didn't think anything of it.

**Scott**

Was that the wrist you broke?

**Chris**

Yeah, yeah. That was kind of weird.

**Scott**

Foreshadowing.

**Chris**

Coincidence.

**Scott**

Okay, so you're getting ready to go. What kind of orientation did they give you before you took off?

**Chris**

On the way up the hill, they were driving up, joking around, showing us videos of previous flights and other people that were doing it, and making fun of the whole thing. It was pretty cool because they were cool guys. They were laughing and joking. We went past the graveyard and he jokingly pointed out, "These are all our former clients." So, it was a lot of fun and good humor.

**Scott**

I wonder if they still make those jokes.

**Chris**

I don't know about that last one.

**Scott**

Alright. Take us through what happened that day from whatever kind of training they do through how everything played out.

**Chris**

We parked at a certain spot and then we still had to walk up several hundreds of feet to get to the launch zone. We were helping them carry the bags and stuff up there. Once we got up there, we split up. My wife was with one pilot and I was with the other pilot. They were setting up the wing, they had us help stick the support rods in, and they were behind us checking it all out. Then, the time came to put the safety harness on. So, he opened it up, puts it in front of me, and said 'Okay, put your foot here', pulled it up, then he grabbed to the top part of it, said 'Okay, put your head and hands through here', and he stitched it all up. Then, there's a bar that hangs from my harness that I can put my feet on when we're airborne and it levels me out.

**Scott**

So you're in, kind of, a Superman position.

**Chris**

Yeah, He had to get that to just the height of my feet. So, he set everything up on my safety harness perfectly. Then, we practiced running. I had to grab a handle on his right shoulder and there was a handgrip on his left side also. So, we practiced the run probably 3 or 4 times so that

we would be in sync and got things going fast enough to get off the hill. After that, we walked underneath the glider which was set up and ready to go. He was doing a little checking behind him that which-- this is my first time hang gliding so I'm not sure what's going on, what we're doing, or anything - I didn't do any research on it. My wife set this up. So, I assumed that everything was good and we were ready to roll. So, we walked up to the edge of the hill there and we waited for, probably, 2-3 minutes - because they had little flags on sticks - for the wind to blow up the hill. There's a big lake in the distance and it's a perfect launch place because as soon as you go off, it starts pulling you up. There's such a breeze coming up. So, when the flag started going pretty good, he said, "Let's go! 1, 2, 3, run!" Then, we ran and you're supposed to run until your feet leave the ground. As soon as my feet left the ground, I was in a precarious situation - I didn't know if I did something wrong. I was supposed to drop the bar that I'm supposed to stand on. I had no clue what was going on. People were asking, "How come you didn't just jump right off?" In the video, it looks like I could but actually, I couldn't because it was way too high. The video was deceiving in that area.

**Scott**

You got some altitude pretty quickly.

**Chris**

Oh, yeah. By the time I was trying to grab on, look up, and see what was going on, I was already over a farmhouse and gaining altitude.

**Scott**

Obviously, the pilot must have immediately realized something was wrong.

**Chris**

Oh, yeah. I was supposed to be floating above him but I was actually hanging below him.

**Scott**

Did he say anything to you at that point?

**Chris**

It was a struggle. At first, we were both trying to-- I didn't know what was going on. I was grabbing and trying to get a handhold. He looked like he was trying to figure out what just happened and I think he realized it pretty quick. So, he was trying to grab and pull me up a little bit, but he couldn't pull my weight up, and I couldn't pull my weight up. I think that's what caused us to veer off to the right immediately. In the video, we veer off to the right. There were houses and some open fields next to those houses, but I don't think he could land there because the wind was coming up the hill so hard that I don't think we could have even landed anywhere there.

**Scott**

When he first realized that near the beginning of the flight, I think he tried to land pretty quickly, right?

**Chris**

It looked that way but I don't think there was a spot. I'm not an expert at hang gliding by any means, but there's the triangular brace in the middle that they hang on to, turn, and do all their maneuvers. To get the tip of the hang glider back down, they have to pull themselves in between that and move the weight distribution up front to get the glider to go back down. Well,

he was stuck in the back and I was hanging on the landing gear. So, there was no way to get the tip of that glider down.

**Scott**

You guys were, sort of, in a permanent 'gain altitude' position.

**Chris**

Yeah, we're just kind of plowing through the air down the hill because there was no way to angle its nose down.

**Scott**

What do you think your altitude was at that point?

**Chris**

I don't even know. Everybody said that we gained altitude - well, we didn't gain altitude, the hill just fell away from us. So based on the size of the little cars that look like ants below me - I don't know - I would say 1,000 plus feet. The elevation of that hill was 4,000 feet, so I'm not exactly sure how high we were from the ground.

**Scott**

Far enough down that if you fell down, you're not gonna make it. When I saw the video on YouTube-- did you edit the video yourself?

**Chris**

Yeah.

**Scott**

Okay. Obviously, the little annotations and graphics that you put on it add some level of humor to it. When you look back at it, you can laugh, but you had to have been scared to death though.

**Chris**

I don't know if I was scared. I just tried to stay calm the whole way down. At one point when I looked down, I envisioned myself falling - I kind of saw myself falling through the air in my mind - and that's when I just decided to hang on as hard as I can.

**Scott**

And you were only hanging on with your hands, right? I mean, it's not like you could get that bar under your arm to get better leverage or anything.

**Chris**

Yeah. My right hand was just searching for something to grab on to most of the time and it ended up hanging on to the fabric of his pants which wouldn't have done anything if I lost my grip with my left hand. If I had grabbed that bar with both hands, I would have pulled myself up, and put my elbow around it or something, that would probably be a little bit easier.

**Scott**

I guess you'll know that for next time.

**Chris**

Yeah. Next time, I would bring extra bungee cords with me so I don't have to worry about that.

**Scott**

Right. Yeah. I understand that you tore a muscle in your bicep.

**Chris**

The biceps have two muscles - one's a thicker muscle which is the bigger part of it and one's a thinner one that holds on to your shoulder via tendon. That one kind of split because I was holding on for too long.

**Scott**

And that was on your left arm that was on the bar the whole time?

**Chris**

Yeah.

**Scott**

Okay. Can you tell exactly when that happened?

**Chris**

No. After I got out of the hospital, I realized that. When you work out, do a little too much, and kind of pull your muscle out a little bit, my bicep felt like that and it wasn't going away. I think I was in the hotel room and moving something when my tricep muscle popped. Then, I was like, "There's something wrong with my arm here."

**Scott**

But that must have happened in flight?

**Chris**

Oh, I'm sure it did. I read a quote by someone, saying, "A normal person uses 40% of their strength." He says that if I tore a tendon and one of my muscles, I use over 100%.

**Scott**

So, even after that muscle was torn, you still kept hanging on?

**Chris**

I had no choice.

**Scott**

You weren't necessarily using that muscle so much to hang though - it was more, like, your hands - right? was that where you felt the weakness - in your hand?

**Chris**

I don't know if it was a weakness. I didn't really feel anything. Holding on was the only thing on my mind. I wasn't, like, 'This is hurting' or anything. I just locked on and that's pretty much what I did. It could have happened when my feet hit the ground and I got my grip got pulled off. I don't know.

**Scott**

What's interesting is the total time that you were hanging was, I believe, 2 minutes and 14 seconds.

**Chris**

Yes. Yeah.

**Scott**

Just hearing that number doesn't seem like a very long time. For somebody who doesn't know how that felt, go find a chin-up bar or something and just hang there for a couple of minutes. Especially when you're in a situation like that where you're thousands of feet above the ground-

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**Chris**

I thought it took forever. Because my wife took off before I did and I landed before she did - she was up in the air for, like, 15 minutes - I thought it was, like, 5 minutes. But when I got the video back, I looked at it, I'm like, "Alright, only 2 minutes and 14 seconds."

**Scott**

And when did she realize that you guys were having a problem?

**Chris**

She didn't know the actual true story until we are in the ER. The pilot went with us in the ER and he sat with us the whole time. He got up to go get his car keys or go to the bathroom or something. And she's like 'Did you just land hard?' because she never knew what happened. She said, "Did you land bad? Did your hand come down or something?" I'm like, "I was never attached." And that's when her mouth hit the floor. She's like, "Are you kidding me?!"

**Scott**

Wow. Well, it's kind of better that she didn't know what was happening. Let's talk about the landing. How did that happen? I mean, how far off the ground were you when you dropped?

**Chris**

My feet actually touched the ground. There was a GoPro that was filming it - it's got the fisheye so it looks like we're actually higher than we were. We were coming in, I saw the ground coming up, and I was very glad to see it because I had about another 5 seconds left in my left-hand grip. I mean, my hand was opening and I didn't have much left in me. I looked down and pointed my toes a little bit. Because we were coming in at about 45 miles an hour, as soon as my toes hit the ground, it just kind of pulled my grip off and I just hit the ground pretty hard and did a couple of flips or rolls. I sat up and compose myself. I hit the ground - it did knock the wind out of me. I sat up and I was, like, "Wow, what just happened?" Then, I was, like, "Something's not right." I looked at my wrist and it was all bulged out. When I looked down, I saw that my wrist is broken.

**Scott**

I mean, if you fell out of a car at 45 miles an hour, it could have been a lot worse.

**Chris**

Yeah. Fortunately, I had a helmet on because I did hit my face and my glasses got pushed in a little bit. I got a scrape on my forehead. My left bicep was just ripped to pieces - like, I dragged it on the street after falling out of a car.

**Scott**



So, the pilot kind of dropped you off, then he continued and landed. How far away was he when he stopped?

**Chris**

I think it was about 100 feet or so. He flew over a fence post and ended up landing in a gun range. I don't know why they have a gun range just above their landing strip, but there's a gun range there. So, he landed in the gun range.

**Scott**

That could have been a whole other level of complexity to this story.

**Chris**

Oh, yeah. So, he got himself unbuckled pretty quick. In the portion of the video which I didn't post, he was breathing so heavily because it took everything he had to get that thing down. So, he was just gasping for air. He unhooked himself, came up to me, and said, "Don't get up. Just stay still." He was expecting that I would get shocked out or something. I just said, "My wrist is broken. I don't know how I stayed calm through the whole thing. For some reason, I said, "My wrist is broken. We need to go get this taken care of." He was, like, "Just stay still." And I'm like, "I'm fine. I can get up."

**Scott**

Sometimes, people in shock think they're fine.

**Chris**

Yeah, I kind of knew it. I just knew that my wrist was broken and that's the only thing I felt that was off.

**Scott**

Just as a side note, what kind of work do you do? I mean, were you exposed to emergency situations at all?

**Chris**

No. Up until this week, I was a parts manager at a Porsche Volkswagen dealership.

**Scott**

Okay. It's not like you're an EMT or something that we see in emergencies.

**Chris**

I got 4 brothers and a sister. So I've seen enough of broken arms, blood, and gore.

**Scott**

It's good to know how you'll react in a situation like that, though - most people don't know because they've never been exposed to that.

**Chris**

I think that's the whole thing - just remaining calm and thinking things through instead of freaking out. I mean, I've had so many people say, "How were you not screaming your brains out and freaking out?" If I did that, I wouldn't hold on because I use more energy doing that.

**Scott**

That's right. Panic is never good. So how did you get to the hospital? Did you land near a road where an ambulance could get to you? What happened then?

**Chris**

The field that I landed on was, I think, pretty much a cow pasture. After that was the gun range. Then, a few more fields up is the actual landing site - the road was behind that. So, once we stood up and started walking, he said, "We need to get to the road so our van can pick you up." So, we started getting over there. I had to climb underneath 2 electric fences with a broken wrist. He's like, "Duck down lower." So, we climbed through 2 electric fences, got to the road, walked down the road a little bit, then his partner with the van came pulling up and they're like, "We're taking you to the hospital. It's right over here. It's real quick. Come on, get in." I'm like, "I'm not getting into anything until my wife sits here with me."

**Scott**

And how far away was she?

**Chris**

She was at the regular landing site. She was waiting for me to land. She asked her pilot, she has her pilot. She's like, "When's my husband coming in? Which way is he coming in?" And he, kind of, saw us on the way down because she has a video of her flight and it's beautiful. As they're coming to land, I see him looking down to our area and he's like, "I think he's down already. There might have been an issue." So, we pulled the van around to the actual hang gliding place and my wife was standing there, looking around, having a beer, and waiting for me to show up. I'm like, "Come here. We gotta go to the hospital." That's when we all got in and went to the emergency room. It took a while. We did some X-rays, went back, and did some more X-rays. They told us, "We need to have surgery to repair it." So I was given the option of doing it now or when I get back home. We just got there, so we had 7-8 more days left. So, we just decided, "Let's just do it now." The pilot stayed with us the entire time. I mean, his flight insurance covered everything so we didn't have to do anything there. He stayed with us until it was, like, 11 PM. I didn't get surgery yet because Switzerland has a lot of mountains. The helicopter brought 3 other people in - while I was in there - who were in worse shape than I was. So, I got pushed back on the surgery table. I was scheduled to go in at 11:30 PM. At 11 o'clock, I told my wife, like, "You can't do anything for me here. I mean, I'm going to be whacked out in surgery." He was gonna drive her back to the hotel, and I said, "Just go back to the hotel, bring me some clean clothes, and come back tomorrow." She wasn't too happy about that but she did. I went into surgery at 11.30 PM and I didn't get out till 3:30 AM. It was interesting - waking up out of anesthesia in a strange hospital where everybody was speaking German.

**Scott**

And so how long were you in the hospital?

**Chris**

I got out of the hospital at, like, 3 PM the next day. Our flight was before noon, so it had only been a day or so - a little over a day.

**Scott**

And you continued your vacation from there?

**Chris**

Yeah, we went sightseeing and stuff. I took it easy for a day at the hotel. We had to go get more bandages and treatments and stuff. I had a brace and a sling on. So, I had to keep taking that off every day and putting new bandages on. We didn't get to do what we wanted to do. We wanted to go golfing and go hiking, but we didn't get to do that. We hopped on the train, went to Lucerne, saw the Lion Monument that's carved into the wall in Lucerne, went around, and checked out different places, restaurants, shops, and views.

**Scott**

Yeah, you're already there. Why not? Do you have any idea as to why did this go wrong? Was it just simple forgetfulness? Did you talk to the pilot about it?

**Chris**

Well, we questioned him when we got to the hospital. My wife was questioning him a lot. After that happened, my wife and I spoke about it, and I asked her how her pilot went through the whole process. Her pilot verbally announced everything he was doing as he was doing it. My pilot-- once we got the harness on, we got underneath there, I think he must have gotten distracted and just skipped a few steps because he didn't verbalize any of that.

**Scott**

Right. He just had his mental checklist that he's probably done hundreds of times. When it's something that's ingrained and done for so long, how can you forget such a critical step? That just seems really odd, but everyone's a human, right?

**Chris**

That's how I look at it. I mean, I'm alive to tell the story. I got 2 surgeries coming up. Still, I'm going to have to have the plates removed from my wrist next month and, then, my shoulder scoped out the month after that. So, he's human. He did all he could in the video. You can see that he was flying with one hand holding on to my safety harness. He was trying to make a beeline landing and getting us down quickly. So it's human here. I really can't point fingers - I'm not that kind of person.

**Scott**

And throughout this flight, as scared as you were, he must have been just as terrified himself.

**Chris**

Oh, yeah. Like I said, when he got to the ground, he was gasping for air. I mean, it took all he had to get us down and do that.

**Scott**

I read that the incident is being investigated by flight authorities in Switzerland. Do you know what's happening there?

**Chris**

I've heard that too. He actually went and reported himself. He went to these Swiss handling authorities, reported himself, and told them the whole incident. The guy was devastated. He's never gonna forget this for the rest of his life. I mean, he felt absolutely horrible about it because he couldn't explain what had happened. He said, "I don't know. It's just who human error. I don't know what happened." He reported himself and I don't think there's really an investigation. I think they might just update their safety standards a little bit. I've received calls from hang gliding places that want to give me a free ride now.

**Scott**

Free hang gliding for life!

**Chris**

They all talk about doing a hang check - a lot of people talk about doing a hand check. That's when the glider is on the ground, you hook yourself in, and then you just hang from the wires holding you up. Then, you get up just to verify that you're locked in.

**Scott**

When I'm watching the video, it looks like we're watching from behind. But it looks like there's another camera out front swinging back and forth. Is there another video facing you guys?

**Chris**

That was their camera. My GoPro was taped to the back tail of that thing pointing down. So, my camera was attached to the back. His camera may or may have not even been on because it was flopping back and forth. I mean, he wasn't touching it. He was just worried about getting me down. If there was any footage on there, I'm sure it has been deleted. By the time I got my camera back, when I was in the ER, the camera footage was deleted also.

**Scott**

Say that again? What was deleted?

**Chris**

The footage of my camera was deleted.

**Scott**

How did you still have the video then?

**Chris**

A place called salvagedata.com. They undeleted the video. They dug down into all the sectors, pulled the video out, and rebuilt it. They do hard drives when hard drives crash and they retrieve information - that's what they specialize in. So, I've sent that off to them and they pulled the whole video back.

**Scott**

That is interesting because my primary business is computer repair and I do data recovery myself. So yeah, a lot of times, people think they can just format a drive and all the stuff will be gone, but it's not really gone, obviously. It's amazing that they were able to get that back. What did the hang gliding place say about why that was deleted?

**Chris**

If it was my company, I don't know if I would have done the same thing - just trying to do damage control - because the last thing I want to do is put someone out of business and hurt a whole community of people that do this for a living. I mean, I've been reached out to by hang gliding associations to know if I'd be willing to help them in their safety procedures. I was told that I brought a lot of attention to hang gliding again.

**Scott**

Is it good attention, though?

**Chris**

It brought attention to it. I think that if they do the safety checks like everybody says they should be doing, that's the way it should be done. But it wasn't my intention to put this video on to hurt that or to make it look bad. I pretty much have a YouTube page just to throw stupid videos in to show my family and friends. When we go on trips, I'll add my video and share it with my family and friends. I had no idea that that video was going to do what it did.

**Scott**

Yeah, it's kind of going viral a little bit. If I were in their shoes, I would be thinking, "Man, this guy's an American. Americans sue everybody. What do we have to do to protect ourselves?"

**Chris**

Well, we did actually talk to a lawyer in Switzerland not really to sue the pants off of somebody, but to know what our legal rights were. Switzerland's an entirely different country than here. It doesn't have ambulance chasers. They put a cap on things over there. So if we did do a lawsuit or anything, we could only get back any funds that we've lost because this happened. So, we went and bought bandages. We took all our dirty clothes, stuck them into my wife's suitcase, went to the post office, and mailed that back to our house so that we didn't have to carry 2 big suitcases. I had a 70-pound camera backpack that I wasn't going to be able to handle - my wife probably wasn't either - so we bought another case for that. My watch got ripped off my arm - I don't know where that is. So, it's whatever you've lost.

**Scott**

So, just reimbursing what you expect your expenses were?

**Chris**

Yeah, yeah.

**Scott**

Here's the big question - would you try it again?

**Chris**

Definitely. My wife wants to do it again. She had a fabulous trip. I mean, she's apprehensive to share her video or any of her pictures because of what happened to me, but I saw the pictures and I saw her video and it was absolutely beautiful. I mean, you can see the background when I took off. She was even higher. She said, "I was, like, flying effortlessly, just soaring through the sky." So, I do want to try it again. I think it's something I should do to get over this.

**Scott**

Well, yeah. And thinking from a statistical standpoint, hang gliding is like skydiving. From the numbers, it's a very safe sport and what happened to you is just such a small chance. I mean, if you go again, the chances of it happening a second time got to be astronomical.

**Chris**

That's just me - it's my bad luck. It's like a one-in-a-million kind of thing. I mean, you don't hear of this happening much at all. I did a little research on Google to see if there was anybody else who had the same thing happen. I didn't find many that live to tell the story - one that came up was a girl in Canada. She was unhooked and the pilot had her wrapped in her legs underneath

her and she fell to her death. I think, at that instance, the pilot actually took the SD card out of the camera and swallowed it.

**Scott**

Yeah. You know what, though? Even that doesn't destroy it.

**Chris**

No, no. They got it back and he was charged with criminal neglect or something like that. So, I'm not looking to put anybody in a bad spot. I think the guy feels horrible about the whole situation and he probably will for the rest of his life.

**Scott**

Yep. He'll never forget it and you'll never forget it. Well, Chris, that's a wild story. Is there anything - any aspect of it - that we didn't talk about that you want to talk about?

**Chris**

When people asked me if I'd do it again, I'd say "Yeah", and they're like, "You're crazy!" We go on trips - every third year or something like that - to different countries. We try something different. I'm 54 years old now. I'm still young enough to get around and go do this stuff. I'm gonna live my life. I'm not going to be scared to go somewhere or do something that might look scary because I can die driving to work in my car. So, I'd rather do that while I'm doing something fun.

**Scott**

I agree. That's the way to look at it. Well, I appreciate you coming on here. I love this story. And good luck on your next hang gliding trip!

**Chris**

Thank you.

**Scott**

Every one of these flashback episodes we do, it's like we'd say, "Man, I can't believe it's five years" but it's true. Five years just flew by.

**Chris**

Yeah. I still keep getting comments every day on my YouTube page, so there's a little subtle reminder,

**Scott**

Yeah, your story was definitely a big one. I mean, it went viral worldwide. How many views has that video had now?

**Chris**

It's got just shy of 12 million views right now.

**Scott**

12 million views... When we last spoke, you mentioned that you had a couple of surgeries coming up - one on your wrist and one on your shoulder. How has the healing process gone since then?

**Chris**

I think I'm a pretty quick healer because I have had no problems with my wrists or my shoulders since both surgeries. I had to have the plate taken out of my wrist, so I had to have that surgery. Then, I had to go through physical therapy and all that again. My shoulder was a pretty simple surgery but that was another bout of physical therapy to get my arms over my head again.

**Scott**

But when you think about what could have happened, I mean, do you ever think about, "Man, I almost died."

**Chris**

Oh, yeah, I think about it all the time. I could have not walked away from that at all, or ended up quadriplegic or even worse. I think that's what kept me hanging for so long. I just decided that that ain't gonna happen.

**Scott**

One thing that we talked about - I think it was after we stopped recording our original conversation - was that you ended up losing your job, sort of, as a result of this experience. How did that happen?

**Chris**

Right after it went viral - the video happened - I had a lot of attention. People were calling me for interviews and this and that. I think I had three news crews show up at my work one day - one in the morning, one at midday, one in the afternoon - and it was a little bit of a distraction but I worked around it. I stayed later and finished my stuff up. I remember showing the controller of the dealership - I remember showing her my video - and she was blown away by it, but then she kept saying, "Oh my God, you're going to be rich. You're going to be rich." And I'm like, "That's not how it is. It's not how things are going. As it's Switzerland, there's no major lawsuit like the US, so there's no real pot of gold at the end of that instance." So I think she had that in her head the whole time.

Things just started happening at work. There was an accusation of theft by me. I've been with the company for 20-some years and I did everything for the company. I'm not that kind of person. So, that really was a slap in the face. They accused me of stealing something, which I proved them wrong because whatever they said I was stealing was right there. I showed them, "This is where it is." and after that, everything was fine. They said everything was fine. A few weeks later, they came out with something else. They were trying to find something to let me go cause I think they thought I was too much of a distraction.

**Scott**

I mean, you didn't post that video thinking, "Wow, this is going to be viral everywhere." And you know what? If it happened in the US, there may have been a big payday for you just because of being such a litigious society like we are.

**Chris**

Yeah. There probably would have been a line of lawyers waiting at the bottom of the hill for me. It was kind of a slap in the face when they let me go.

**Scott**

But you landed back on your feet. You've got a similar job at another place and you're doing fine, right?

**Chris**

Oh yeah, definitely still planning our trips and everything.

**Scott**

Yeah, that's what I wanted to ask you about. I mean, I think you call yourself an adventure traveler and you do something regularly. What do you have coming up?

**Chris**

Next trip, we're going to the Azores - it's the Hawaiian Islands of Europe - someplace we've never been, and my wife always sets these up for us. She's always looking for the next spot that we can go to and she's been right on. I mean, we've been to some absolutely beautiful places. When we go there, we always look for something to do - something a little more exciting off the beaten path. I'm not sure what the Azores has for us just yet, but we're always looking for that specialist excursion or something that we do that's out of the ordinary.

**Scott**

Right. Something fun. Have you been hang gliding again?

**Chris**

One year after the incident, I went back to Switzerland and I ran off that same hill.

**Scott**

Oh wow. With the same company?

**Chris**

Different company, different pilot. I flew with Wolfgang Siess, who is, like, one of the top hang gliders in the world. It was a very awesome experience. It was what I wanted in the first place.

**Scott**

Much better than the first time, I'm sure.

**Chris**

Oh yeah.

**Scott**

And did the guy who took you, did he know your history of what had happened?

**Chris**

Oh, yeah. It's a crazy story because I always took the high road in this whole story. I didn't name names. I didn't point fingers. I didn't try to bash anybody for not hooking me up. It was an error. It was an accident. That's what I look at it as. The Tourism Board of Interlaken, Switzerland, really liked how I approached that, so they approached me and asked if we wanted to come back to Switzerland to redo our vacation. Yeah, they set everything up for us.

**Scott**

Wow, you can't turn that down.



**Chris**

No. We set it up on the last day of vacation this time to go hand gliding again and it was fantastic.

**Scott**

It does look like fun. I've never done it, but it just looks like it would be pretty amazing.

**Chris**

Yeah, it's just effortless. I mean, you're just flying, you're just sailing above the ground. I mean, we've done hot air ballooning before and that's kind of different. You're effortlessly just lifted off the ground and floating through the air. It's an awesome experience.

**Scott**

Now, something that you've done more recently is you wrote a book about this experience. How did that happen?

**Chris**

I had the idea for a book probably within a year after the incident happened. I worked a mile away from here. This is the second job I took. I was in Fort Myers. I was driving every day to Fort Myers and back. So it was like an hour drive back and forth. I had a little microphone recorder and I was just telling a story every day, back and forth, just everything I can remember and all the things that had happened to us.

**Scott**

Kind of a brain dump?

**Chris**

Yeah. Then, I just kind of compiled it all together. Finally, after three years, I started to work on it and put it all together - put everything that we went through and everything that happened to us.

**Scott**

The book is called, "A Beautiful Day to Fall." Kind of a dark title, sort of. Do you take kind of a humorous approach to the whole thing?

**Chris**

I do. It's how I handle things. It's how I deal mentally with things. I just throw fun at it because what can you do? You can't take things too seriously. I was trying to come up with a good name for it and, in several of my interviews before, I said, "As I was hanging on for my life, I looked down and I thought this is an actual beautiful day and I'm going to fall to my death here." My wife picked up on that and she said, "How about this? A beautiful day to fall." And I'm like, "That kind of fits really good."

**Scott**

It makes sense. Watching the video, you can see that it was a gorgeous day.

**Chris**

Oh, it was absolutely beautiful.

**Scott**

Well, your book is available on Amazon and we'll have a link to that. So, if anybody wants to pick it up, they can certainly do that. Chris, thanks again and have fun in the Azores!

**Chris**

Oh, thank you. Going to find something to do - maybe not hang gliding, but we'll figure something out.

**Scott**

Here's something I would not have predicted – because of being in the news for this, Chris has been on a couple of German game shows. Right after his hang gliding video went viral, he was on Das Quiz 2018. Then just a few months ago, in September 2023, he was on Kaum zu Glauben – that episode will be live in March.

And I want to tell you about a podcast that I just subscribed to recently. You know here on this show we've done a few episodes that have to do with giving birth. In fact, back in episode 91, the whole episode was people telling their own individual stories about when they gave birth, and the strange or funny or even sad things that happened.

Well, now there's a whole podcast that has stories like that – it's called Birth As We Know It. And this isn't a paid ad, or a trade, in fact the host, whose name is Kiona Nessenbaum, doesn't even know I'm mentioning it here. But I'll tell you, she's amazing. And I know that because I actually met Kiona recently at a podcasting conference. And I'll tell you this – she is passionate about birth stories. That's why I love it, and why I think you will too – because we all love an amazing story. So go and check out her show – you can find it on any podcast app, just search for Birth As We Know It. The episode I really recommend to start with is episode 22, with her guest named Anissa (ANISSA). Or you can check out Kiona's website, which is just her name – [kionanessenbaum.com](http://kionanessenbaum.com) – and don't worry about trying to write that down, because I'll have that link in the episode notes at [WhatWasThatLike.com/167](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/167).

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

And now, this week's Listener Story. This one is from my friend Lauren. I've known Lauren for years. She lives in New York City, and I see her at conferences all the time because she runs a company called Tink Media, which is at [TinkMedia.co](http://TinkMedia.co), and she helps podcasters grow their audience. So if you have a podcast and you want to reach more listeners, get in touch with her.

In this story, Lauren tells us about the time she fell down, and was helped by a stranger. And I have to tell you I absolutely love this story.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in a week, with the next NEW episode of What Was That Like.

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(Listener story)

**Lauren**

I'm a runner. In 2014, I was training for the Disney marathon. I'm a huge Disney nut. I was in pain. I had injured myself but I thought it was something small. I actually had an MRI appointment scheduled but, before the appointment, I was walking to work - it was January - in New York city, walking up Park Avenue with a big 7-Eleven coffee in my hand and I fell on some

ice. The second I fell, it felt a lot of pain, but I didn't realize how bad it was. I spilled my coffee everywhere and my first thought was, "Oh no, I'm going to have to go get more coffee."

I realized I was having trouble getting up and some people swarmed around me and they seemed— I'm sure if I was okay but one woman made a beeline to me and picked me up, and I was leaning on her. I said, "Oh my gosh, thank you so much. I have to go to work." She said, "You can't go to work. You're hurt. You have to go to the hospital." I don't know how she knew this - and I didn't. Anyway, I was like, "I guess. Okay. Sure. I could tell I was in a lot of pain." So she said, "I'm going to call you a cab." And I said, "You don't have to do that, please. I'm sure you have to be somewhere." She said, "No, I'm going to call you a cab." So she called me a cab and then I realized how much pain I was in and that I couldn't really walk.

The cab arrived and she said, "You know what? I'm going to get into the cab with you." And I said, "Please don't do that. Don't you have to go to work too?" And she said, "No, I'm going to get in the cab with you." So she got in the cab and told the cab driver where to go, "NYU Langone," which is a hospital. And I said, "Who are you?" She said her name was Sharon, that she actually worked for, like, a medical device company, and she knew the right hospital to take me to because she said that when she had moved to New York City, she and her friends had memorized the best hospitals to go to in case of emergency in case they got drunk and needed to go to the best hospital. I would not have known that.

Then she told the cab to take me to a special entrance that I also would not have known about. So we got to the hospital and she said, "You know what? I'm going to go get you a wheelchair." I said, "You know what? You don't have to do that." In my head, I was thinking, "I hope that you help me because I can't do this alone this whole time." I've been telling her, "No, go to work." And in my head, I was like, "Please help me." She seemed to have known that I needed her help. So she went and got me a wheelchair and she's like, "I'm going to wheel you in." And I'm like, "No..." but she does. Then, she wheeled me in and helped me do my paperwork. She helped me go to the bathroom - a stranger - and she wheeled me into the doctor. She stayed with me the whole time.

In the car, I discovered that her name was Sharon because she was from Sharon, Pennsylvania and that happened to be the town where my Grandmother lives and where my family is from. They did an emergency surgery on me. I had broken my hip. I could have died. There could have been a blood clot. I had to go on work disability and I was on crutches for a long time, which was actually when I started listening to podcasts. I fell in love with podcasts on crutches and the doctor had told me, "You're never going to be able to run the same way. You can maybe run, but you won't be able to race." And I thought, "Let's see about that."

I did everything they said. I followed all of the physical therapy. I took it really seriously and I came back really slowly. I'll never forget the first day I was allowed to run. I was so excited. I had the date marked on my calendar and I went out on my run. I was allowed to run for 7 minutes and I came back. My husband said, "How was it?" I was in tears and I thought, "This is why people hate running. This was so terrible. I'm never running again," but I kept at it.

Less than a year later, I was in the Disney World Half Marathon - it was a princess half marathon - and I was wearing a Tinkerbell costume because I love Tinkerbell and I won the whole race. There were tens of thousands of people in this race and I won, and I had no idea that would happen. I remember starting out and thinking, "Oh my gosh, I think I'm going to get in the first 10, the top 10." And then, "Oh my gosh, I think I'm going to be in the top five." And it

was, honestly, the happiest moment of my life to cross that finish line. It meant so much more than if I had won any other race. I was in Disney World, the place where I felt the most magical and happy in my Tinkerbell costume, where I also felt very happy, and I won.

I kept in touch with Sharon for a while afterwards, but I have lost touch with her. So Sharon, if you're listening, please reach out to Scott and have him connect us once again because you saved my life and you made me love running again, and I just don't know where I would be without you.